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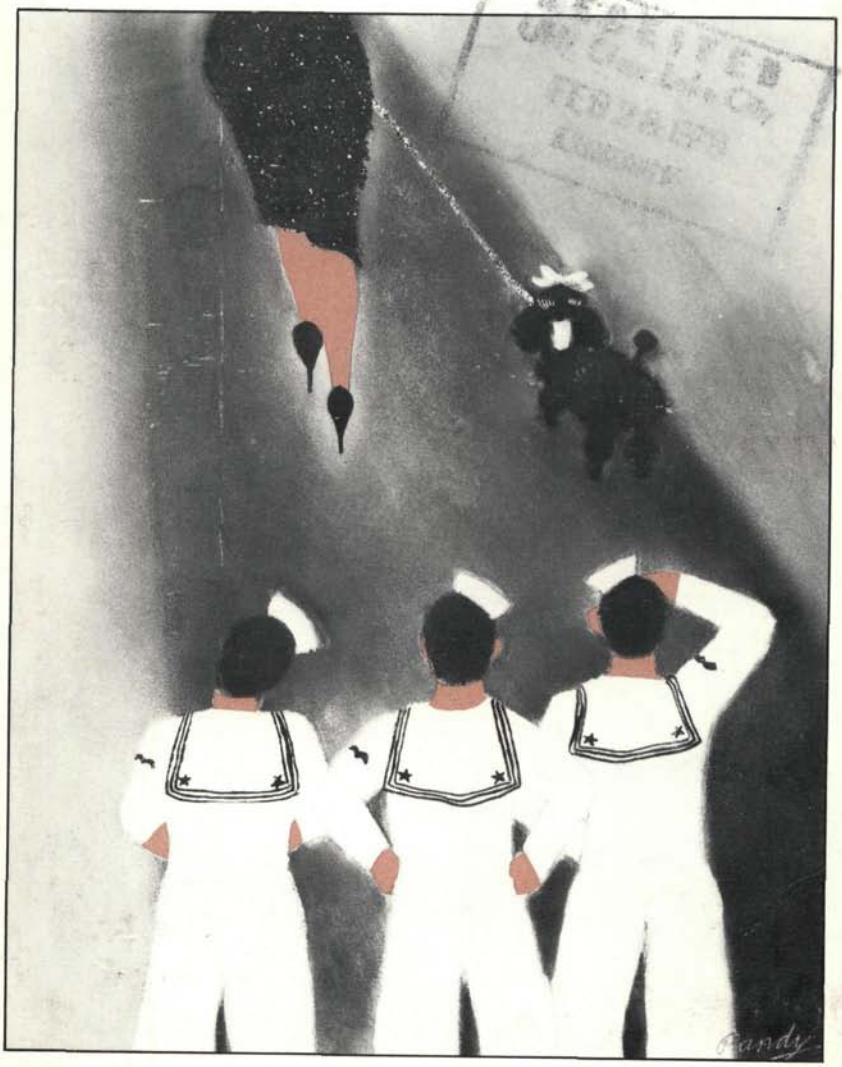

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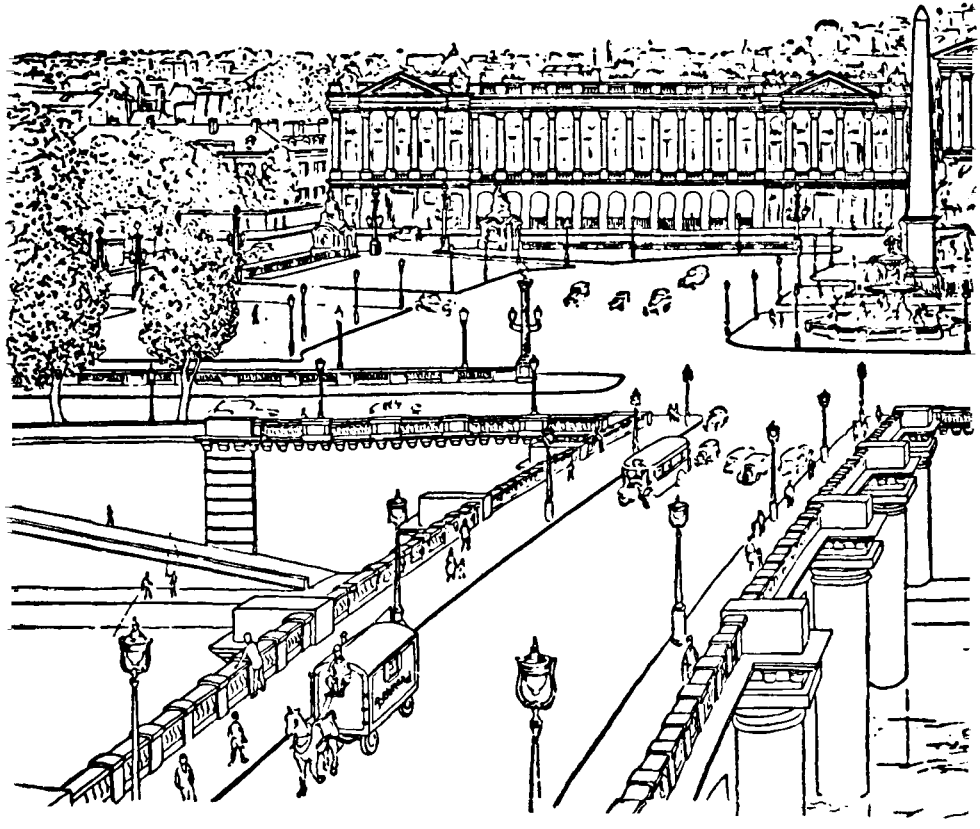

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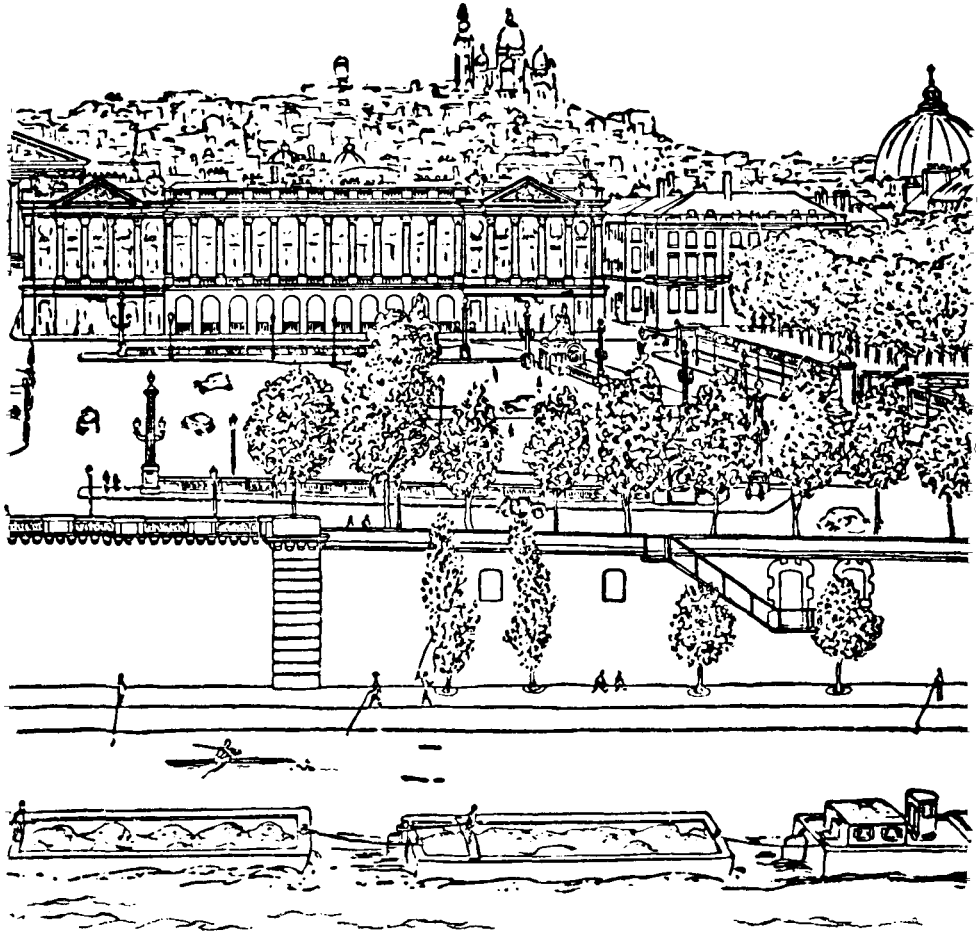

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The Lesson

Arno Karlen

Today I helped bury Reinhold Wladyslaw Bezinski, the man who saved me from becoming an embittered, second-rate French horn player. I once thought telling this story would pay my debt to him. Fifteen years have passed since our brief weeks of lessons, but only today, in a sunny, cool cemetery in the Bronx, did I fully realize that I will never be done with him.

Bezinski didn't know how deep lay the roots of my musical malady. It wasn't decided I'd be a musician, but always assumed. My grandparents were borne to this country from Ukrainian ghettoes on money wrung from fiddles and keyboards by desperate, precocious fingers. There were two famous virtuosi and several distinguished professionals. The greatest was Sasha, a grand artist of his generation; he died before my birth but lived vividly through my mother. We listened to his records together, and she tirelessly told me how brilliant, sensitive, handsome, rich . . . I think I always sensed that he had been her first, perhaps her deepest love. Handsome?

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I examined the photos; Sasha alone, with Serkin, Bing Crosby, Einstein. They showed a rather short, slender, balding man with a sensual little mouth and haunted eyes. The brow domed mysteriously high, the eyes were deep-set but light—not blue, like mine, said mother, but almost violet. My father shrugged, wisecracked about "the underslung violinist." The photo did show short legs and lordosis. My father knew the enemy when he saw him. He was in watch parts, wholesale.

I started on the piano at six. Mother imparted that I might even go my forebears one better and become a conductor. At eight I was closing my bedroom door, playing overtures and symphonies on my phonograph, and conducting before a mirror. At ten I accepted my musical destiny—ecstatic and covered with gooseflesh as I waved in the sweep of massed horns at the end of the Beethoven Seventh.

At eighteen I entered the conservatory. It was already clear that I was a skilled pianist but lacked the fine virtuoso edge. No matter, I had long decided that if I couldn't be Sasha, I would be Stokowski. Like him, I had a mop of blond hair and balletic hands, and blond muttonchop whiskers to boot. For two years I studied with rising desperation. My mother and I had always known a conductor is more than a graceful artistic traffic cop, but not how much more. Facility with scores never came. The day before my first try at conducting the conservatory orchestra, I scanned and rescanned the pages like a drowning man. At three in the morning I closed the score and wept. Pacing till dawn, I finally admitted I did not have the gift of reading a dozen staffs—in three clefs, for instruments in a half dozen keys—as an organic unity. At nine o'clock I went to the conservatory and withdrew as a student.

I hid from family and friends, moping in my room. My bones ached, my scalp and teeth itched. I cursed my presumption, my naive vanity. My dreams, I realized, had not been my own; I had studied more from duty to family myth than to myself. Silence was unbearable; I played my favorites on the phonograph. As I reached emotional exhaustion, I lost

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myself in them. The Seventh, with its golden avalanche of horns, still gave me ecstatic chills. Stubbornly I decided that if my study had been wrong, my joy in music hadn't been, nor my ambition to wake that joy in others. Stories of new beginnings rose in my mind. Toscanini had changed from cello to conducting, Casals from flute to cello, and of course there was Bezinski. As I dwelled on Bezinski, I came alive again.

I had heard Bezinski's story from musicians many times, with different turns and ruffles, set in different cities and attached to various conductors. But the basic points never varied, for this improbable tale was quite true.

Reinhold Wladyslaw Bezinski was born at the turn of this century, the only child of a Silesian pig farmer. By age six he was clearly a prodigy, but poverty made him divide his childhood between fiddle and hogs. The elder Bezinski sold off pigs one by one to pay for more and better lessons. When Reinhold was fourteen, his father died, then his mother. He sold the last pigs, bought long pants and a train ticket, and arrived broke at the door of the great Dohnanyi—who ignored the lingering scent of swine and took him as a scholarship pupil of composition.

At twenty-five Bezinski had made a few strong concert tours and published a few violin sonatas, conventionally romantic but melodious. He then came to America as first fiddle in a respected quartet, and Stokowski heard him. The maestro was already notorious and adored, an inspired taskmaster who gave virtuoso players numbers and drilled them like serfs. He hired Bezinski on the spot, sure he had found both a concertmaster and a kindred spirit.

Tales of Bezinski's precision and brilliance sped before him to the first fall rehearsal. The orchestra expected a Hugo, a Barrymore, an Einstein of the violin. When he entered the hall, they fell silent. He was short and slight, a dry, grim young man in a skin-tight black suit and wing collar, with close-cropped hair and thick spectacles. He walked like a wind-up toy to his chair, clicked his heels, and gave his new colleagues a jerky little bow. Several nodded awkwardly in

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return. While the others were still wondering what to do, Bezinski sat down and began warming up. They listened above their own arpeggios and heard a pure, full tone, exact intonation, and sure, aggressive phrasing.

Unforgivably, Bezinski had not only skill but earnest arrogance. He was in fact a martinet with as cruel a passion for perfection as the maestro. If someone turned a page with a rustle, Bezinski's eyes froze him. A hint of sharp intonation drew his crucifying gaze. Bezinski continued to nod and click his heels with each hello and good-bye. He ate alone. No one knew where he lived. Somehow word had spread: he had grown up on a pig farm, but one must never even mention his past.

Then one day Stokowski called for a run-through of his latest Bach transcription. Everyone thought he'd announced a later day, so no one had practiced it. After a long, treacherous run by the violins, he stopped them and called for a repeat, stopped again in disgust. He ordered each fiddler to rise and play the passage, working forward from the last stand. No one satisfied him. He went faster, stopping men after only a few beats. The assistant concertmaster rose, sighed, and fluffed the second bar. Stokowski looked to the concertmaster and pleaded, "Please, Herr Bezinski! Demonstrate the passage!"

Bezinski rose, tucked the fiddle under his chin, and raised the bow. He hesitated a moment, eyes oddly staring, like marbles in aspic. He sawed through the notes. After the last downbow, Bezinski dropped his arms to his sides, sweating. It had been worse than anything before. Stokowski wrinkled his forehead like a washboard, elevating his blond mop. The entire orchestra broke into tides of laughter.

What happened to Bezinski no one knows. One version says he was suffering from gas, trying to control his sphincter more than his fingers. Another that he'd always been prey to unpredictable fits of paralyzing stage fright. Whatever the cause, he stood for a few moments while a hundred men's orgy of laughter rolled over him. Then he abruptly bent over,

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put his case on his chair, and packed his violin. Not till he snapped the case shut and spun on his heel to face the entire orchestra did they stop. Bezinski snarled—a real snarl, a sound of animal rage. They stiffened into silence. He shouted:

"Before I play again for pigs, I will live again with pigs!"

He turned and marched out of the Academy of Music and never returned. True to his word, he bought a pig farm in Secaucus, New Jersey, and lived there, a recluse. He never performed again.

People always laugh uneasily at this story with a too ingenious ending. But fiction cannot match reality, and the most extraordinary part is yet to come. After years in retreat, Bezinski returned to music. But not to the violin. He taught himself the French horn from scratch, and became greater on it than on his first instrument. He still did not perform, but he sold the pig farm and took a dingy apartment in Brooklyn, where he began receiving a few students. They came because he had published the labor of his seclusion, an unorthodox and brilliant new method for mastering the horn, based on his own amazing trial-and-error achievement. Every horn player I ever met owned Reinhold W. Bezinski's *Method for Virtuosity on the French Horn through Industry and Craft* —with that wonderfully ambiguous last word. By then Bezinski had former students in every great orchestra and gave master lessons to the best professionals.

A conservatory friend of mine, named Fitler, had studied briefly with Bezinski. He said the old man was still nearly a hermit. He was suspicious, eccentric, devoted to crank cults from homeopathy to theosophy. To become his student, you had to write a self-abasing letter begging his acceptance, according to a formula passed on by his former pupils. If you mentioned his past or asked why he didn't perform, he went into shrieking fits and threw you out forever. His apartment was a clutter of books, strange instruments, statues, and junk, his doorway littered with old newspapers and bottles of souring milk.

It was natural that Bezinski should seem to hold a message

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for me during the days when I hid in my room. I was not a great pianist or conductor, but I had musical skill and was ready at last to burn with my own fire. I decided in a dizzy religious passion to start afresh, on a new instrument, the horn, with the great self-made master himself. I would recreate myself, as Bezinski had. Surely he would understand my leap toward a new beginning. Already resurrected, I phoned Fitler, the horn player, and learned how to write the obligatory letter:

> Esteemed Herr Bezinski:
>
> I am writing to entreat the privilege of an interview so that you can determine whether I shall have the honor of becoming your student. I will present myself for your consideration at any time and place of your convenience.
>
> Most respectfully,
> Paul Ziskind

For four frantic days I rehearsed my appeal to Bezinski. Then I received an envelope containing a white card with his name written in florid, old-fashioned script in sepia ink. Beneath the name were an address near Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn and a date—October 2, 1960, 8:00 P.M. That was tonight.

I arrived a half hour early at his building, a grimy old six-story apartment house amid warehouses and dim Syrian restaurants. His name was written by a buzzer in the fine sepia script. After circling the block several times, I pressed the button at precisely eight. No answer. I rang again, waited. After the fourth try, a return buzz unlocked the door.

The halls were pale green, lit by flickering fluorescent bars and scented in a few places with urine. Before a fourth-floor doorway lay three Secaucus newspapers and two bottles of milk. Though sweating with anxiety, I grinned at the sight; even the mad trivia of the Bezinski legend were true.

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I knocked, heard a quiet shuffling just inside.

"Who iss there?" The voice was dry, with a mild but distinct accent.

"Paul Ziskind."

"What time is it?"

I checked my watch. Sensing I was crossing a minefield, I answered carefully, "Exactly five minutes past eight."

"You are late."

Praying it was the answer he expected, I said, "I'm very sorry, I had trouble finding the door."

"Ridiculous. My name is on it." But the chain was being undone. The door opened just enough for Bezinski to peer out. I saw a small, lean head with close-cropped gray hair. He had a tiny snub nose, a small straight mouth, and round, dark little eyes. The skin was pale, almost boyish. On his nose rested frameless bifocals with octagonal lenses.

Bezinski looked me up and down, then stood back to let me enter. He wore black trousers, a black shirt open at the collar, and soft leather slippers. I stepped over the bottles and papers. The room was dark except for a strong lamp on an old wooden desk piled high with sheet music, bound scores and books. The green window shades were drawn. On the wall across from his desk hung a huge phrenology chart with four heads, drawn from front, back, top and side, each divided into sections containing Roman and Arabic numerals. Tarot cards were tacked across another wall, and against another stood a big glass case containing antique horns and several strange ones unlike any I'd ever seen, rather like alto horns and slide cornets. On a table in a corner were pliers and files, a blackened pot, lengths of brass tubing, a Bunsen burner, and a can of brass polish. White ice skates lay on the floor behind the desk.

Bezinski relocked the door and nodded me to a heavy leather chair facing the phrenology chart. I sank into it. Bezinski went briskly behind me; there were noises like books being handled.

"Mr. Ziskind—*shuffle bump*—we shall discuss a few

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things—*thump*—you understand I am in no way whatzoever—*rustle*—committed to taking you—*shuffle*—as a student. . . .''

His hands clamped over my temples, and I jumped half out of the chair.

''Mr. Ziskind!'' he barked. I sank back. ''Hold straight, please!''

His powerful little hands crawled over my cranium, forehead, cheeks; he was peering over my head at the chart. I looked at the worn, dark oriental carpet, the faded somber wallpaper with its dusty rosettes. At last Bezinski removed his hands. He came around to face me and leaned down to examine my mouth.

''Say booooom.''

''Boom.''

''Longer, booooooom.''

''Booooooom.''

''Say wheeeee . . . tighter at the corners of the mouth, stretch. . . .''

I did so. Finally he sat on the three-legged stool before his desk. All his movements were swift and economical; between them he was perfectly still.

''Now tell me why you want to study with me.''

My eager speeches wilted within me. The room was cool, but sweat kept forming on my upper lip. Bezinski's severe face, peeled down to the small essentials, his terse authority, made me feel I was addressing the priest of an ascetic cult. In a thin, strained voice I told the facts—a lifelong ambition to be a musician, studying the piano, the conservatory, dropping out. . . .

''I only take serious students,'' he interrupted, rising.

I jumped up and said sharply, ''I happen to be extremely serious!''

For a moment he appraised me, as surprised as I by my combative glare. He pursed his mouth judiciously, sat down again.

''All right. Continue, please.''

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He sat very straight, intent, like a wire taut with silent humming. Talking to him was like staring into a searchlight. I wanted to say, I want your crazy, pure self-conquest, a triumph lovely and self-willed. But I knew he allowed no reference to his past, and I was sure he hated gushing. I sat down and continued with reflective care.

"Because I want not only the best teacher but the least orthodox."

He nodded. "And why?"

"By normal standards, starting the horn with you now may seem crazy, but I know it's right." He was still listening; my voice grew surer. "I love music but I failed it, or failed myself. I have to start over, not because it's my family's dream or a childhood dream, but my dream. And I want a teacher so good that if it fails, I can't blame anything but myself."

It was as true as it could be without saying more about both of us. I awaited his sentence, and was amazed to see a slight smile deface his little mouth, a few tiny wrinkles form about his eyes behind the octagonal lenses.

"If you will permit a personal remark, Mr. Ziskind, you are a bit of a puppy. But you are still young. I do not accept all that you say, but I accept that you believe it, and it is somewhat appealing."

He erased his smile and took a black loose-leaf book from the desk, and opened it on his knees. Using a straight pen dipped in a thick glass inkwell, he headed a fresh page with my name. Glancing at the chart on the wall, he entered several numerals; then he asked for my birth date and recorded it. "The ascendant," he said quietly.

He closed the book and looked up. "Mr. Ziskind, usually I take only masters and very advanced pupils. But I will accept you for a short experimental period."

I started to bubble out thanks.

"Mr. Ziskind," he interrupted, freezing me. "I think you have some idea what attitude I expect from you."

I nodded. Fanatic, I thought. Flagellant.

"I speak frankly. Your musical background is mediocre.

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Phrenologically you are only so-so. Zodiacally, fair. Your mouth is not ideally formed for the horn, but then neither is mine. We shall work hard and perhaps we make some discoveries. You will buy my Method.''

''I already have.''

''That was presumptuous, but just as well.'' He headed for the door. I was amazed again by his fluid energy, the boyishness of his face. He must have been past sixty, but age had merely brushed him in passing.

''Next Friday at eight o'clock. Sharp. Prepare the first exercise. We are not to mention fees.''

He made a stiff little bow from the waist. I awkwardly returned it.

''That will not be necessary, Mr. Ziskind.''

''Thank you.''

He unlocked the door, and I stepped over the bottles and papers. Before I could say goodbye Herr Bezinski, the chain slid into place and there was silence. I walked quietly down the stairs and raced grinning to the subway.

Every day for a week I practiced the horn until my lips tingled and finally went numb. Hoping I'd figured out Bezinski's game, I arrived and rang his bell at five of eight. Sure enough, I had to ring several times, and when I reached his apartment door it was precisely eight. He congratulated me dryly for being punctual. Why the delay? Exercise of authority? Compulsive ritual? Time to set things in order? In disorder? I never found out. Nor did I learn why the doorway sometimes contained one, three or five bottles of milk, two or four newspapers. Apparently he took in varying numbers of each, as needed.

Every lesson was unpredictable. At the first, he asked me to play the first exercise, but I had finished only five or six notes when he sprang from his stool and held out his hand.

''Mr. Ziskind,'' he said curtly.

My heart pounded. He was already done with me. I numbly took his hand; it was limp as a dead eel, but I pumped it gently a few times before letting it drop.

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"So how did you like that handshake, Mr. Ziskind?"

Perhaps it wasn't over. I smiled ingratiatingly. "It could have been better."

"Precisely."

He returned to his stool and perched. His voice became more intense, his eyes smaller, darker.

"Never forget that flaccid hand. Your first attack is your introduction. If it is flabby, it repels. Play a wrong note if you must. Everyone plays wrong notes sometimes. Oistrakh plays them, Casals plays them, I play them. But when you announce yourself, never be insipid. It is better to be wrong than inaudible. Better to be coarse than tentative. As you say here, Mr. Ziskind, belt it out!"

His Prussian-sounding belt-it-out was hard to hear with a straight face, but I tore through the piece with vigor and mistakes. I loved my own gusto this time. When I took the horn from my lips, I saw the phantom of a smile about his lips, but he complimented my decisiveness and went on to my intonation.

All the lessons went this way: I stood at the music stand in the middle of the room; he sat on the stool, staring at the chart or tarot cards and listening, then abruptly interrupting. Sometimes he set aside the music and had me sit in the big chair while he lectured about the music, the instrument, myself, in language laced with mysticism and outdated vernacular. He had an oboe of a voice—vibrant but not very deep, nasal, and piercing without shrillness.

It was always intoxicating and frustrating, like a marvelous new obstacle course that roused my best energies. For instance, when I played Exercise Four, he stopped me to say I wasn't executing the quadruplets evenly. I replayed the first eight bars, which ended on a sustained E flat. He got up shaking his head again.

"No, no. Too even. Which makes it uneven, *nicht wahr?*"

I looked back in confusion.

"You know that for quadruplets to sound even to the listener, you must lean on the first of each group. If you play

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them exactly even, the first actually sounds weak or even shorter."

I nodded.

"And when you play the long E flat and hold it even, what happens?"

"It isn't even," I guessed.

"Exactly. It seems to fade. You must add something, as with the quadruplets. Not time or loudness, but intensity. You smuggle in an edge of color and tension."

"I thought I did, but I guess not enough."

"Precisely! And you know why?" He leaned forward and drilled his dark little eyes into mine. I shook my head. "Because you are afraid. You don't want to be a bad boy and break the rules. Mr. Ziskind, cheat! Your ear must lose its innocence. It is a way of playing, a way of thinking, a way of living. Corrupt yourself, lie, for the listener *never* hears what you really play."

He was gathering momentum, and he waved me to the armchair. I sat there, horn in lap.

"Take it from the beginning. The composer cannot write the sound his mind imagines. No notation can hold half the possibilities of instruments and players. The score is a message in code, demanding a conspiracy, for you to recreate the unwritten. If you reproduce notes exactly, you fail the composer and the hearer. You must become a liar. A magician, a seducer, a fraud. You sell, as they say, the Brooklyn Bridge with every note. It is all a trick, like pulling rabbits from hats and painting in perspective. After all, the painter cannot put objects on flat canvas, he trompes the oeil! The listener's ear, like the watcher's eye, is a romantic virgin. She wants to be lied to so she can say yes. She accepts the message only if it is given correctly—that is, incorrectly. If you tell the literal truth, she thinks you are dull or even insincere."

He rose from the stool and took a few quick steps toward me, thumbs hooked in his belt. The skin that showed at his open collar was very pale.

"Mr. Ziskind, you strain for exactness like a conscientious

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schoolboy. Grow up. Lose your earnestness, your need to be right. Learn the joy of cheating. It is the only way to give joy to others. Art is not for children or innocents. You must become a confidence man, a gangster of the heart.''

Where did this severe little man with eight-sided spectacles learn such things? Did he sneak out to roister in whifty bars and alleys? Or did he have a gift for knowing things by merely smelling them through the crack under his door? His own playing was exactly what he preached—technically immaculate, with a tough driving energy and faculty for surprise that widened one's eyes. I left each lesson wishing I could practice day and night. I did try to imitate his way of warming up; he played the horn call from *Till Eulenspiegel* in one key after another, playfully adding grace notes, tricky mutings and bell tones. I tried it very, very slowly, losing the last descending notes in windy splats.

I went to the next lesson ready to cheat like hell. This week's exercise was a tender adagio. I lied with my heart, lips and lungs, with every fermata, rubato and vibrato. When I finished, Bezinski snorted.

''Self-indulgence,'' he said. ''The effects are arbitrary and strained.''

''But I was cheating,'' I pleaded in dismay.

''You weren't cheating! You were merely misbehaving!''

My face must have dropped to my knees. He took a gentler tone.

''Mr. Ziskind, I am sure you know better than to be artistic. Artists cannot afford it. It is for audiences only, for people who equally love music and cats. If you must choose between dullness and slush, always choose dullness.''

I shook my head in frustration. ''Now I'm afraid to go either way, too strict or. . . .''

''Just listen to the notes on the page and try to speak them. The art may magically appear. We do not know what it is or where it comes from, it is an electricity we court. Our training is only to become good lightning rods. Or if you like, think of art as a woman. Be strong, clear in your intentions, and patient.

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You cannot win her by making her a fantasy goddess and dreaming her into your arms, nor by trying to rape her. She likes passion, persistence, and restraint. So when you play, forget falsetto and shouting. Do not croon or rage or whisper. Do not belch novel endearments because they are charmingly unfamiliar. The listener who wants to be flogged or tickled is not worth your effort. Just speak, strong and clear, and perhaps inspiration will visit."

I felt hopeless but knew he wasn't trying to be cruel. He tolerated only perfection in himself and expected no less from me. In fact, I hated it most when I suspected he was going easy, for his passion was contagious. After the fifth or sixth lesson I said to him:

"Sometimes I feel that you say my best is awful but go easy when it stinks."

"And that seems humiliating."

"Yes."

"Does a teacher help by whipping a student who knows he does poorly? A teacher must surprise, not only confirm. Besides, I think sometimes you misjudge when you are best and worst."

I sighed, knowing he was right, but not cheered. He gestured me to the chair. I was now approaching it with more pleasure than I did the music.

"For many weeks we have had fine progress. I am not being kind, surely you hear it. But something remains wrong, and perhaps now is the time to discuss it. Somehow your own determination stands in your way. It is not that you work too hard, that is not possible. Rather, you care too much to be correct, and you have a bad critic listening in your mind. Let us try to change him.

"No actual audience can judge you. Few know enough, and those few can make mistakes, have caprices, become tired or cruel. And I am a temporary help only. My job is to help you create an inner listener, the only one you can finally trust. He is the product of your best judgment, and he grows as you grow. He begins as a combination of people, a mental jury of

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those whose judgment you trust. Eventually they fuse, cemented by something that comes only of yourself. You have not yet shaped your own listener. I know because you are often stiff and tight as you play, and when you relax it is sometimes only to show off. I ask you to think about it. For whom do I play?''

I had never examined myself as carefully as I did the following week. The next lesson went fairly well, devoted mostly to breath support and tonguing. As I packed my horn, I said, ''I've been thinking about what you said last week. Who I'm playing for. I asked myself whether I'm trying to impress you, or my old teachers and classmates, or my parents or girlfriend. I do want to impress them all, but mostly I want to impress myself.''

It almost sounded like a Bezinskiism, and I felt very wise. He took off his spectacles for the first time in my presence and barked:

''Mr. Ziskin, a congratulation!''

I grinned.

''You diagnose your problem perfectly. Now, stop trying to impress yourself. Impress the instrument, the music, the composer. If you permit me the statement, they have so far earned the right more than you. They deserve the best you can give them.''

I increased my practicing from four to five hours a day.

Despite my labor, I felt growing frustration, but the lessons were so exhilarating that they kept me going harder and longer each week. For instance, once he stopped me after only one bar, had me repeat it, and interrupted a second time. He asked me whether I knew why. I didn't, for I thought this lesson especially well prepared, and the repeated bar an improvement.

''You do not misplay, but something is missing. This begins with two eights and a triplet. The first time you played without rhythmic clarity. When I stopped you, you sensed that and corrected with thumping emphasis. You know why both are not good?''

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"Because I must establish the rhythm without losing the flow of the phrase."

"That is the textbook answer, and it is true. But more. Further."

I thought, finally shook my head.

"Because your opening notes are your first magic." He paused, looking at me inquisitively, head tilted a bit to one side. I found myself almost smiling. "You see, you want to smile, for your instincts recognize the truth. All right, let us imagine you are walking in the country with friends, yes? You feel playful and yell and run around. Then someone takes a stick, draws a circle and says to play—what do you call it? One person chases the others till he touches someone."

"Tag."

"*Also,* someone draws a circle and says play tag. Now everything is changed. A tree becomes . . . home, you call it that too? . . . good. A stream becomes an exile you must flee. A rock becomes safety to yearn for. Each person is hunter or hunted. Even trivial things have meanings and relationships. It is the same when you start a story, 'Once upon a time . . . '; that draws the circle. The first notes of a piece of music must make the magic circle, enchant the listener into accepting the rules of this particular game. That is why rules do not deaden life but give it risk and adventure and deepness. Sometimes rules make magic automatically. You know the Zen and Hasidic paradoxes?"

"No."

"Well, just set up any paradox. A thing equals its opposite. Hate is love. Love is hate. Silence is music, music silence. You see? Just by following a simple rule you are forced to be accurate and maybe even profound. Any idiot can be a sage. But the sage is an idiot when he refuses all rules in seeking originality. To always try for spontaneity makes you always self-conscious. The result is a pretentious smear. The arts are full of failed talents who tried to obey no rules and be like no one else. They make brilliant little patches, no more. Your Walter Pater was like that, *nicht wahr?* Finally his lust for

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idiosyncracy makes him more artificial than many rule-followers. The greatest artist aims to be invisible behind his work's perfection. He has something in mind and concentrates on getting it exactly right. Originality, no matter how bizarre it seems at first, is always the result of being as true as possible to some idea. The other way go the buffoons who play the Minute Waltz in thirty seconds or perform with their elbows to free their souls. On a page of music a man's voice is speaking, in spite of staffs and keys and rules, yet through them. Do not fail him or betray him. Recreate him faithfully, like a spiritual double. Because a clear human voice always holds us, moves us, cheers us.

"So yes, the first notes establish the rhythm and the phrase's flow. But more. With a slight emphasis or anticipation, you recreate the composer's magic circle, without which it is all just a porridge of notes. It is once upon a time, the tiger burning bright, the first four chords of Bach's chaconne for lone violin. Always you must draw the circle."

For the first time I sat in the chair without being told. He patiently let me think. Finally I spoke, slowly and with care, as during my first visit.

"You tell me to lose my innocence, to cheat and lie. Then you say follow the rules. But make magic. Be judged only by my inner listener, but respect the music more than myself. I'm confused sometimes, and there are moments when I start to get angry at you but know I'm really angry at myself."

I was looking sullenly at my shoes. He reflected a long moment.

"I think perhaps I have presented too many difficult things too fast. Do not feel crowded. Try to relax. Apply yourself as best you can, and I will think about what you said, and whether I have made an error."

I left with foreboding, and it hung over me all week. The day before the next lesson, I practiced till my lower lip split and blood gushed into the mouthpiece. There was no way to get in touch with Bezinski, so without my horn I went at the regular time and explained at the door what had happened. He looked at the lip.

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"It will heal in four or five days. Come in and sit down. We will talk a little."

I stepped uneasily over two milk bottles and a newspaper.

"Let me offer you some refreshment."

I was delighted and flattered. Bezinski went into his kitchenette, and for a few minutes, while he clinked pots and spoons, I stealthily inspected the room. The burner was warm, and bent brass tubing lay by it. In the glass case was a new horn with an odd little sliding valve. On the desk stood a new item, a life-size plaster head, the cranium covered with red lines and black numerals. A score lay open near it, Hindemith's Concerto Grosso; marginal notes were written in German in sepia script. Scattered about were long yellow sheets covered with notes in what must be Polish, and score paper with music for horn and chamber combinations, especially strings. Five books lay in a stack, three on music, Hesse's verse and the *Aurora* of Jacob Böhme.

When I heard Bezinski returning, I hurried to the big easy chair. He entered with two steaming cups, gave me one, and sat on his stool. The infusion gave off a sweet, pungent odor, and bits of golden flower floated in it.

"Camomile," said Bezinski. "It is very soothing."

Suddenly I felt the dread of a man awaiting an incision. The tea was too hot for me to drink, but Bezinski sipped steadily as he spoke.

"It is just as well you cannot play today, for I want to talk about your progress. You know I take almost no unadvanced students, but I said we would have a try because your intensity and, as you yourself put it, the improbability of your enterprise are touching and impressive. I even confess that they wake a sympathetic nostalgia in me, for my own reasons which you could not know. I now feel I have heard enough, and I will not tantalize you but say first that I think there is no point in continuing."

"After only nine lessons!" I shook my head in protest. "You said there was improvement and. . . ."

"Please! Let me explain, and then I will answer your questions. Drink your camomile and hear me out."

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I wanted to argue and plead but slumped disconsolate in the chair. He finished his tea and wiped the mist from his glasses with a dark-maroon hanky.

"You are as able as any but the specially gifted, you have worked hard and improved. Most teachers would have you continue. But I think it would be wrong, in fact unfair. For despite your talk of humble determination, I think you want to be distinguished as the very gifted are, and I doubt you will do so in music."

I began to protest again, but he gestured me to wait. I sank back and nursed the tea, trying to fashion arguments.

"At this stage I may not convince you that beneath your lamb's earnestness lies the wolf's ambition. Few young students can admit it, for they think it crass and ugly. But then they do the most egoist thing of all; they quit if not assured they will be, as you say, hot numbers. So what they are really saying is, if I am not sure in advance to win, I do not play the game. If I must be seen falling down, the devil with ice-skating. They demand to begin where they might end. And since the way is long, they give up along the way.

"Mr. Ziskind, you do not have the makings of a great virtuoso, only of a solid if somewhat lackluster professional. When you admit this to yourself, you will end the lessons, most probably on some pretext. Why should we wait for that? Consider. Some men are suited to plodding, middle accomplishment. I have enormous respect and spiritual admiration for them. They are the slightly gifted and deeply devoted, who through stubborn industry become third-chair players in second-rate orchestras. Through love of their work, they go on without the rewards the very gifted win. But you will not settle for that, I think.

"Now please, Mr. Ziskind, repair that long, wounded face you are wearing. You look crushed, and that is needless. I am not saying that you are doomed to wander forever between two possibilities, lacking both great gifts and, as you say, stick-to-it-iveness."

"How else am I supposed to take it?" I felt indignant yet

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ashamed, like a schoolboy punished half justly.

He rose and came to stand before me, with his air of tense, terse authority. I wondered fleetingly whether he had dozens of dark shirts and trousers or just rarely changed clothes.

"This is not a post-mortem. It is a diagnostic probe. Perhaps it is your turn to accuse me of presumption. I am supposed to teach music, not meddle in lives. But we do not teach a bag of tricks or even a subject. We teach a man. And it is a man who teaches, by example. I show you how I think and work, for you to take what you can use and reject what you cannot. Now, as a teacher I believe I should explain why we must end our lessons. It is because of the confusion of aims and means that made you come to me in the first place. Would you care to listen?"

I could only nod, fearing that if I opened my mouth I would rage or weep. He hooked his thumbs in his belt.

"Beauty, we have agreed, is created by specific playing techniques, *nicht wahr?* Yet there is no muscle in your lip for passion, no key on the horn for elegance, no valve for tenderness or valor or regret. This contradiction has bothered you. I cannot argue logically for what must be felt as unity. But think. Beauty comes from artifice. An actor in the grip of grief could not convey it to an audience, he would only make them voyeurs to his pain. An ecstatic poet cannot write, he rolls in ecstasy and babbles. Sincerity never performed a sonata. Even as one's heart is in grief or ecstasy, the mind and fingers are cleverly elsewhere. But this does not mean technique is a collection of set figures, like the ones a skater learns. It emerges from a creative impulse, like a muscle movement from a nerve impulse. So technique is the soul of art and never a stable, settled matter. An artist reinvents technique with each task, and his past knowledge is useful in only a general way. Art remains a venture without progress, in history and for each artist. There is only a constant succession of problems, and each time all is new, all ventured."

"I thought I understood that," I pleaded.

He shook his head. "You believed you understood. Yet at

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bottom you still expect to learn techniques once and for all, apply them to notes, and then coat the whole thing with style, or feeling, as with some supernatural gloss. Producing an effect both exact and moving. That is why except at your very best moments, your playing tends to be either rigid or affected—depending on whether you are more intent on mechanical or artistic perfection. That is, whether you want to be above reproach for your skill or your soul. But that way you excel in neither.

"I asked you once whom you were trying to impress, and you said quite accurately yourself. But how? If you want to be an angel, you do not observe that angels have wings, labor and save pennies, and buy a pair. No, you labor to better your soul. To work and hoard for wings with greedy eagerness only makes you ridiculous. Then you are like people who take drugs to become in a minute, through chemistry, what the saint labors all his life to reach. It is never the same thing. It is ersatz vision, ersatz salvation, fruit without a tree. No. You labor to do better, and if that labor does not give you joy, you never reach the end. It is that way for music, for all things. You must love and lose yourself in means. You do not observe what musicians do and diligently work as if paying a tariff. The kingdom is not to the ambitious or the dutiful. It is to the obsessed and the joyful."

"I truly felt joyful when I started."

"Yes, I think you did. But soon you became merely feverish."

I had to nod. Did it show that I wanted to cry? His smooth-skinned face was stern, but he was trying to go as gently as his truth allowed. He finally returned to his stool.

"I said I try to teach by example, for better or worse. I am a zealot, I think. You may have observed that. It is not a choice. Music is not my job; a job is labor for bread. It is not my profession; that is something one works at seriously. It is my calling. It demands me. I cannot turn elsewhere. Now you, Mr. Ziskind, are perhaps a young man listening for a calling. If it were music, you would know by now. I think that rather

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you love the idea of being a musician. You want to play on a stage in tuxedo, make people laugh and weep, and be recognized in the street. You will even pay the price of hard work.

"But a real musician is a man with an obsessive love for the quality of a particular lip slur. He is compelled while shaving to think of compensation in triple-tonguing. You said you once wanted to conduct. A true conductor feels that all over the cosmos sonorities cry desperately for balance. But you saw yourself conducting. Your model would be from the ballet as much as the conservatory. You romanticize and covet the end. But for success you need an all-absorbing lust for means. Don Juan needs conquests, not women. The magnate needs profit, not wealth. The musician needs a horn to his lips, a perfect high D. Men desperate for ends are like all desperate lovers—unsuccessful. Greatness is helplessness before a calling, the wake left by a noble obsession. If you crave a calling, stop asking yourself, 'What do I want to *be*?' Start asking, 'What do I need to *do*?'

"Please do not be bleak or bitter. I think you feel a little better already. Since your fourth or fifth lesson, you came here with desperate eyes. Now despite yourself you look almost relieved."

I raised my head in surprise, realizing he was right. Part of me was enraged, part abject, part numb, but part was in fact relieved. Bezinski lay his hand, as if in blessing, atop the plaster head on the desk.

"Your impatience and seeking, your attempts at honesty, may be signs that you have the temperament of the gifted. A gift that has not yet called you. All the gifted suffer spiritual intolerance. You groped for the thing where your intolerance is greatest and found music. But when I corrected, you were desperate not that the music be right but that you be right. You have not yet invested your intolerance in something outside yourself. So it comes back to wound you. You must aim it outside yourself. Unless, of course, you aspire to be a saint, a virtuoso of self, but I suspect that is not your dish of tea either. You may even some day feel called to teach—to profess,

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to testify to your experience. What your calling will be, Mr. Ziskind, I cannot say. That is for everyone, as you say, his own red wagon. But I have at least tried to be of some help."

He stood up. It was over. I rose, and for a light-headed moment considered vengefully throwing his own history in his face. But I knew it could not lessen what he had said; it would only poison the relief mixed with my anger and shame. Almost choking on the words, I answered only, "I'll think about everything you said."

"Good. I am glad you do not tell me to mind my business. I am fulfilling my pedagogic duty as I see it. However downcast you feel, it will probably change. I am happy if I helped you narrow your choices. As I confessed, you remind me somewhat of certain experiences when I sought a calling. The circumstances were different, but perhaps the problem is always the same. I wish you luck. You will know your calling when you hear it, no one will have to tell you. You see, I have found mine."

He broke into the only full smile I ever saw on his face, a sudden childlike radiance that made him an eternal youth, and he waved his arm around the room, taking in with one wide gesture his horns, his notes and manuscripts, his books, his phrenology charts and plaster head, his tarot cards, his burner and blackened pot, and his three-legged stool.

"You have a wonderful adventure ahead, Mr. Ziskind. I would not even be unhappy if some day, when you evolve to a higher rung of cosmic consciousness, you write to me, informally, and tell me how it turned out."

"I will," I said without looking him in the eye, and we shook hands. He had a terrific little grip. At the door he said, "My fee is whatever you think my teaching is worth. You are the best judge. Perhaps nothing, perhaps a fortune. If you are uncertain, I suggest one hundred and eighty-three dollars and forty-three cents. Good-bye."

The door closed, the chain slid into place. I floated down the steps and into the street. I wanted to feel tragic, but as I traveled home I felt increasingly tired and uncaring. In my

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room I turned the horn over and over in my hands, a lovely, useless weight. The next day I sold it and sent Bezinski the exact sum he'd named.

The following two years have a clouded quality; they left few marks in my memory. I worked as a salesman in a record store, along with other would-be or unemployed musicians. I think I made amiable faces, but inside me was a thick fog, in which there lay, somewhere, the half-digested experience with Bezinski. Then one day I read in the *Times* that Bezinski had died, apparently in his sleep, in the apartment in Brooklyn. I could not comprehend that the flame was out. The obituary, which I tacked to my wall, consigned him to conventional, secondary greatness, with an oblique sentence about "eccentricities." His will called for cremation, no public service, and there was something about a bequest to his students, since he had no family.

A few weeks later I received a small parcel with a letter from a famous Bezinski protégé, the master's executor. It said that in accordance with Bezinski's will, his instruments and papers were going to a museum, his other belongings being distributed among the students listed in his record book, with this message:

"Please accept this modest token of my thanks, for the lessons which were so great an education to me."

As usual, he had the last splendid, challenging word. My parcel contained his worn wooden pen, with sepia ink still coating the steel nib. I kept it on my dresser. Bezinski was silent, the pen sat there, and I was slowly pulled from my lethargy by an anxious sense of unfinished business calling me. One sunny fall day, much like those when I took my lessons, something Bezinski said—about testifying to my experience—made me decide that a record of that rare man should exist, and I alone perhaps would take the task. I tried to recreate our meetings. My first, weekend-long attempt appalled me. I didn't recognize him or myself, I couldn't catch his speech, the whole thing was mawkish yet stiff. I was disgusted and stubborn, called in sick at work, and began again,

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working six and eight hours a day at my typewriter. Finally I gave up, for the time being, not sure whether I had tried more for his sake, history's, or mine. Then I realized it didn't matter. For the first time I had labored without counting the hours or calculating the response, only because I had to.

I have continued to write, to testify, and I return to Bezinski. Like him, I have become something of a zealot, and I love my work even when I complain of its frustrations. I also retain some of that old lame wish to be rather than do. But as Bezinski would say, I doubtless have a few more rungs of cosmic consciousness to climb. He pops into my mind unexpectedly. Sometimes I manage to find the word that lashes a sentence alive, and I hear his nasal clarion, "He trompes the oeil!" and I grin. I still draw on his advice, when I can, in my different art; as he said, the circumstances differ, but the problem is always the same.

Like his other former students, I was invited today to his reinterment in a crowded cemetery in the Bronx, a business engineered by a famous horn player thirsting for publicity. Many in the large crowd of musicians were bemused or smiling in reminiscence; I hoped that some day I too could leave a legacy not of grief but of smiling men. I watched the eerily small box of his ashes go into a hulking red granite monument he would have scorned. And when I heard the words "Rest in peace," I began to grin. No way is he settling for that. I imagine him as an angel with wings he constantly redesigns—busy becoming some new, outrageous and superlative sort of angel, an angel's angel. Whose voice, I thought as I walked off amid headstones and sycamores, will never quite blend into anyone's choir.

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Two Poems by Judith C. Root

To Pose a Chicken

after Norman Rockwell

First, pick up chicken, rock back
& forth, back & forth, then set down.
He will stand where you put him four
or five minutes. Rush to easel

& paint quickly. (Difficult but
easier than painting on the run
& can be repeated again & again.)
A bigger challenge is to paint

full face since a chicken's eyes
are not like yours. When he looks directly
at you, his head is turned. But art
can master nature's quirks. Just find

a long stick, set your chicken
as above & hurry behind your easel.
With one hand rap the stick
against a side wall & with the other
paint. If the chicken looks at the wall,
he will face you.

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The Real Thing

Cheapest gas for miles around.
One VW bug, two pickups & a 4x4
nudge for position,
suckle pumps
manned by an all woman crew.

Chipped pumps, shading
to rust, a pitted and oil
puddled drive, the careful
lack of attention
to detail. No Swiss motif
split cedar or artificial turf.
A serious station.
CLEAN RESTROOMS upside down
covers a cracked window.

We know by their loose tailed
shirts & grease streaked jeans
these $AV-MOR gas jockeys mean
business. Service with a smile,
a come-on flirt, easy coins
for carhops, are off limits
at this island where emission
controls, loose tie rods,
short charges and dipsticks
are small talk's hard currency.

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Elizabeth Neiditz

That I was not Insane, or Worse

I write suicide notes in bed late at night
So they'll know when I'm dead
That I was not insane, or worse, unkind.
That I took the time to tell them each
What they meant to me.
To my mother I owe my green eyes
And floor length auburn hair.
I would like to thank my sister
For the pillow case she crocheted
On my twelfth birthday
And the five dollar bill she has sent me
On each birthday since then.
Everything I know about shop-lifting
I learned from my eighth grade best friend, Linda Hope
Treadwell.
One Saturday Bobby Butterman, going on thirteen,
Taught me how to kiss, slid his little tongue in
And out of the spaces between my teeth.
Sebastian Lust gave me a three-week-old fetus
Which I named after him and flushed down
The toilet at the Howard Johnson's
On the New Jersey Turnpike, near Camden.
Sam Plumm, who played Wimbledon three years in a row,
Is responsible for my powerful backhand. My first true love.
And my father, a master of the two-line letter
And the fifty-six second phone call,
Liked to say that "brevity is the spice of life."

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David L. James

You Are Made Of Glass

windows, fit together
at the joints except for
your face which is a mirror.
Your husband clearly knew
what he was getting when
he married you. On those
lovely trips when he drove
you out to the woods, he said
he could see the world through
you; your body of grass, oak
trees, the dirt of corn fields.

By now, he is used to the cold
breasts digging in his chest
like icicles. He is even amused
by kissing his own reflection
in your face. After you take a
shower, he likes to rub your
skin with a towel, shining the
oval stains of water. In bed,
you seem to glow for a few seconds
after the lights are turned off.

Still you know you are a woman
and come to accept certain pains
like those nights when he climbs
on top of you, pushing farther
and farther, exploding inside like
a handful of small pebbles, dotting
your back with cracks.

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Dean Faulwell

Dreamboat

A child walks by,
clutching in its small hand
the blueprint of happiness.
It will use this blueprint
to construct a toy for itself,
one it can play with
until the sun goes down,
until its mother,
suddenly mindful of the hour,
sticks her head out the door
and coos: 'Bedtime, Angel.'
At which point Angel
will climb aboard his small boat
of dreams and sail away.
Look! He is sailing
past Father, at whose throat
a comical knot has been positioned
to hold back anger.
But have no fear. The knot
appears to be strong enough,
so that Father,
far from expressing anger,
is actually waving at the small boat,
wishing it the safest
of all possible journeys.
How wonderful it is
to think of this tiny vessel
coursing through the night,
to imagine the miniature sail
into which the sleeping child

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But what *is* its goal?
It doesn't seem to know anymore
where it's going.
In fact, it is bumping
into chairs,
bruising its delicate hull.
But what the devil are these chairs
doing in the middle of the ocean?
The ocean's no place for chairs.
Let us remove them,
you and I,
so that the small boat
can continue on its way.
But, no, we can't remove the chairs.
They are too bulky.
And, besides,
Father is sitting in one of them,
arms folded across his chest,
the comical knot
having been removed
from around his throat.
He seems to be angry about something.
Fire is shooting from his nostrils,
singeing the eyebrows
of the poor little child.
Oh! What is going to become
of this child?

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In his left hand
he clutches the blueprint of happiness,
while with his right
he must attempt to put out the flames.
Meanwhile the boat
is sailing in a circle,
as though it were confused,
as though it had no goal,
no purpose in life
except to sail in this circle,
the wind at its back,
Father's flaming anger up ahead.
But wait! The child
has slipped a knot around Father's throat
and is towing him out to sea!
What a picture this makes:
Father, sitting in his chair,
being towed out to sea,
The child, standing at the helm of his ship,
clutching the blueprint of happiness
between his teeth!
Yes, somewhere there's a boat
whose name is 'Pleasure'
and it is sailing
all around the world
looking for a port to land in . . .

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Karen Hubert

My Sponge

My sponge
fresh out of her cellophane
A starlet, unintroduced to my kitchen's ways
What does she know of the jealous Scrub-Dub
reserved for teflon faces
or the rusty Brillo
exhausted from the really hard work.
She comes, my sponge, all blond and dimpled
fresh smell
moist to the hand
A virgin
So touching, her willingness to please.
She loves to be complimented on the way she soaks up water,
milk driblets and other dainty spills.
She squeezes clean under the faucet
like a Catholic after confession.

She loves to be used
But used well
And there the problem begins.
Our divorce.
She thrives on cleanliness, Borax freshness
I do my best to go along
But as luck would have it
I'm stuck one day
with a fry pan of scrambled eggs
turned gooey in the water
And I can't find my Scrub-Dub.
It's a nasty business
I hate to do it to the kid

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We face it together
After all, she's yellow
the egg stains hardly show.
But you know the old story—
You run out of Scott Towels
Forget to pop into the Bohack
on your way home from work.

You begin to mop the floor with her.
At last the love affair is over
She feels nothing for you anymore
You've reduced her to shame and remorse
To bacon grease.
She lets herself go
Stains her coat
Her dimples droop
Her freshness turns rancid
Coffee grinds and vinegar
She's disgusting.
Her very presence offends you
You, who managed her career.
Another sponge gone to pot
Another sponge that couldn't be trusted
You wouldn't dream of letting her near your formica now.

Time for a new face
Reach into the cupboard
Ah yes, there is one more
Sniff it fresh out of its cellophane humidor
There she is, your lovely
Your pet
Pink and all afire
A little fox this time
The redhead!

She looks around and takes things in
She likes what she sees
It's good enough, anyway.

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She cracks her gum and gets to work
This babe has no illusions
A childhood of snapping fish and lobster claws
Oh, she's been through a lot
and that's not all
Can't she see clear as day
That yellow thing relegated now to wiping up under the
cat's dish?
"Where's your gook and spills? Let's have no phoney
bullshit here—
Keep things on the up and up and I'll do okay by you."

At night, after she's finished the dishes
Wiped down the walls like a pro
After you've turned out the lights
and gone off to bed
It's rumored
that she plays hot music on the radio
and shakes her tail at the faucet
This one's all for having a good time
Boogying
As long as her terrific good looks hold out.

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Two Poems by Sandra Alcosser

The Plant Ladies

I was sent to my room to think things over
So I sat with white dog
On a ledge
Twenty stories high in golden haze
Concrete belfry
Breathing black oxides from the East River Drive
Watching the turd-eating seagulls dive.

Periodically a maroon Cadillac passed
Under my window and tooted
It's Now or Never into the wind.

Friend Dorothy on the eleventh floor
Had all the best shrinks
Gurus
Five brilliant husbands
And a C-R group
But she never got solved either.
Stacked together in a dead-faced totem we
Stared west at the Statue of Liberty.
There was no choice.

But Burpee Seeds saved us.

Nursery stock
Like broken nerve endings
Bugged
Rotted.
We pick pick pick, deadhead
Loosen the earth, massage the roots
Whisper
Play Bach flute sonatas and
They survive.
We become the plant ladies.

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Our souls spore-borne
Heart-shaped gametophytes
Descend
Lie like liverworts
On sweet sour soil.
Bodies left behind in a room of wallflowers and
Baby's Tears.
No one notices.

Fern women
Hairy creepers
With untouchable
Head likessores
Up from swamps, thick and malarial
We possess the seed, the sex, the fruit.
Wind gives us rebirth:
Sweet Everlasting, Virgin's Bower
Corn Cockle
Sunflower
Moonflower fanned by ten-inch
Tongue of hawkmoth
Darwin's dream
Bush bean
Columbine
Silver Queen

And Dorothy calls herself Iris.

Detectives on our trail
But we do not fit the description.
Scabs, cankers, slugs
Such, pierce, chew
Sow bugs
Maggots
Six-spotted leafhoppers
Crotch-weavers
Coddling caterpillars.
We *try not to be eaten*
or taken alive.

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Thief

enters the dream
like an octopus floating
in its own ink.

He takes everything:
ingots from the Philippines,
German pistols, chess queen,
your grandmother's diamond rings.

Maybe it's the sleepwalker
who mows your lawn,
eyes like sliced eggs,
or your wife's lover,
the neighbors' son.

It doesn't matter.
You knew he'd come.

His feet on the carpet
as though it were your skin.
You bleach the linen,
but you can't drown him.

He is your thief.
A kelp that needs its rock.
He holds you in sleep,
tentacles knotting.
He will leave you clean, clean.

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Two poems by Ann Darr

Everything in the Kitchen Sink

Why are the hubcaps in the kitchen sink?
I'm having dinner guests, it's as
simple as that. My organizational
methods are as orthodox for me as
yours for you. I'm not going to
pick up my guests with those muddy
hub caps flapping away in the trunk making
sounds like a dimestore counter full of
cupcake tins ajumble in a wheelbarrow.
I can't put them back on the car until
I've washed them. Isn't it possible
everyone has hubcaps in the kitchen
sink and you've just never noticed?

Once I walked into your kitchen
close to noon, blinded by the opposite
of sun, and saw you bending to
a task in your kitchen sink
that made me assume you were
having a roast chicken dinner
later on. And then my eyes stopped
reeling and made signals to my brain
and even as I was scratching out
my assumption—*dinner? dinner?* I saw
that what you were scrubbing was
a brand new baby I didn't know you had.

The Reply

What shall we say to our sister?
Say that we have found a way to ground the sun,
say that we will come back over the rim of the world

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and load her on our sled and travel together
forever after and she will never be lonely again,
say that.
And she will say she has broken open the egg
of the world and found it empty, and she has
climbed into the boat of the oceans and the wails
were missing, and she has listened to the cottonwood
leaves rattle their death rattle through every season
of the year, and has risen in the middle of the night
to mount the sled and the snow glistens under the moon,
the laughter freezes.
Say to our sister that she need cry no more,
we will bring buckets for tears to empty them
in the ocean so they will do no more harm
to the garden, so the salt will buoy up
our bodies instead of killing the plants, say
we have found the secret of light in Greece,
say she will never need to live without lovers,
say she will grow new bone marrow to replace the old,
say you are sorry it comes too late to do her any good,
say that.
And she will say hokuspokus, and she will say
santo domingo, aliminokus, and she will say
open sesame seed, and don't ever darken my door
again, and she will say hickory dickory dock,
my death will stop the clock, and she will say
thank you and farewell, the jig is up.
And say to our sister how her bone marrow
has blighted the garden, and hell is in her
head, how the earth is a great cereal box
with a prize inside, the Garden of Eden,
and she will say she has walked the railroad
ties searching for copperheads, she has
grabbed the axe that struck the rattles
from the rattler's tail, that she has become
sister to the snake by watching him hold his head
alert in the grass to observe the light.

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Three Poems by David Ray

Meeting the Boat

It was a pretty boat, tied to the pier,
greeting a city with streets of water,
the great gold griffin of its tall smokestack
making the least of us feel important.
The wealthy were met by their hired greeters.
Women in furs waved at their gigolos.
I knew by my heartbeat you had not come.
I went on looking, torturing myself,
transforming each woman into your shape.
Each came close, then veered off to another.
I stared, as if you had grown all that hair,
dyed yours, or bought one of those silly wigs.
Who knows what you might have done without me?
But no, that one wasn't you. Nor that one.
Nor were you wearing huge green sunglasses.
At last only those who were very vain
were still in their cabins, brushing, primping.
Then they came down the plank like movie stars
holding their bright coats. I checked each suitcase,
at last found one that could be ours, or yours.
But that one I already had with me,
brown and tied with a string. You just weren't there.
Never arrived at Venice, never said
you wouldn't. The trattoria I had
in mind could do without us, serve others.
The bar where we could have a drink just died.
The place for us just floated out to sea.
I left as quickly as I could, a mile
away began to know what had happened.
It helped to think about it hard, not soft.

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Your knife went through my heart. But I only
tried to die, I didn't. I did the right
thing, or so it seemed, filled myself quite full
of pills, got drunk, and tried to kill myself.
But those friendly rats of Venice saved me.

My Bitterness

I gave up some of my bitterness. Let me tell you why. Because you can prove the world is a good place, but you can't prove it a bad place, that's the truth, unless you're willing to go to someplace like Hanford, Washington, where they keep the nuclear wastes that'll be spilling into the Columbia River and then into the Pacific; the iodine alone's enough to finish off the human race. I gathered up evidence for years sure to prove not only the intentions, but the achievements, of evil. But all I did was accumulate a houseful of sickening data, like dusty plastic flowers of terrible colors with no intensities. (You've seen those scrapbooks of wallpapers made from old aunts' skirts.) The facts are indisputable and beyond doubt. The facts are beyond question. That's why they're called facts. Who's questioning the facts? I could prove some things, in fact, about the slab of human viscera left in the Norge refrigerator in the autopsy room, and I wouldn't even have to put it under the microscope to do so. (Did I tell you, the green light's on any time an autopsy is in progress. Next time you're strolling down the corridor, just wander in and watch. It's free. And when the autopsy's over, they turn off the light.) But why bother? Who wants to put a piece of something like that under the microscope? That's what I did to my life for years. And I know too that the breath of the city can make a computer's printout dance a regular ballet, just from the poisons, a skein of fiberglass right across your nose. But to hell with it. One might as well try to recover

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the knuckles of a young concert violinist, knocked apart against pines airliners have slammed into on frozen hillsides. Better to forget one's mission and enjoy the cool shade of hillsides that don't mind serving happiness as well. Better to forget one's mission and enjoy the cool shade of those pines, the crazy moonlight through the branches. As soon as I forget a few more facts I shall doubtless find myself, as they say, delighted.

My Mission

It is true, as I have implied, that everyone should give up his mission, whether it's to save the world, as mine always has been, or to live the life of a Don Juan. I've tried that too, but it did and it didn't work out. I tried to cure myself time and time again, like that Don Juan in the Japanese story who tried to cure his lust by stealing a beautiful woman's chamberpot, thinking that if he made himself smell it, he'd be cured. He managed to get hold of it (a wonderful gleaming porcelain pot) and began smelling its fumes deeply. But they merely made him swoon with ecstasy, and he realized he'd have to look more closely to sicken himself. A closer look revealed an aromatic brew much like beer, with turds of sandlewood floating round. He knew he'd simply have to eat the stuff to be done with thoughts of this lady. He ate one of the turds as if it were a cinnamon stick. But he loved the taste. And that's how it worked out with me too, me and the world.—Though I feel like a fool, proving that shit is delightful, and I'm not going to make another mission out of proving it to anyone else.

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Joe David Bellamy

A Talking Dog Is No Circus

My Dalmation yearns to speak to me this morning.
She is more-than-elegant in her sleek musculature—
demure, nubile, oddly cat-like before breakfast.
Once in the fields she crouches, her face to my face,
her eyes bulging with conviction, venerable
as the pocked statue of a griffin seated
two thousand years on the desert floor,
virgin throat pulsating with grisly secrets;
the beasts know how to live, I'm thinking,
blindly improvising beyond time—oh to be
drawn through life by such a nose!
The grasses dry to a sticky pertness
cantilevered toward the sun like radar dishes.
Man and dog, we curl up in this crisp orange light
my ear pressed desperately to her underbelly.
After hours of thundering, I hear:
Always pee on bushes at the *corners* of your yard
It's a dog-eat-dog world; only vomit on cloudy days
Avoid cats and porcupines; eat bloodroot for heartburn.

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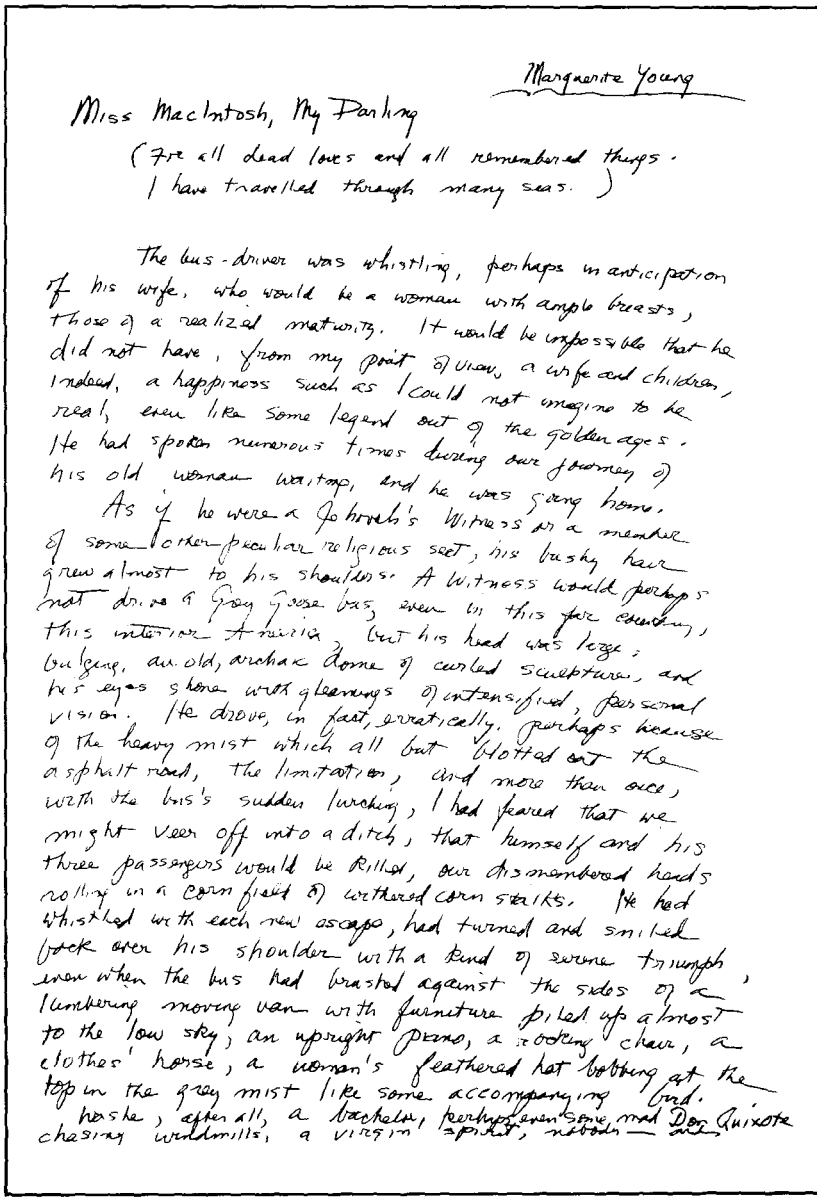
Marguerite Young

Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

(For all dead loves and all remembered things.
I have travelled through many seas.)

The bus-driver was whistling, perhaps in anticipation of his wife, who would be a woman with ample breasts, those of a realized maturity. It would be impossible that he did not have, from my point of view, a wife and children, indeed, a happiness such as I could not imagine to be real, even like some legend out of the golden ages. He had spoken numerous times during our journey of his old woman waiting, and he was going home.

As if he were a Jehovah's Witness or a member of some other peculiar religious sect, his bushy hair grew almost to his shoulders. A Witness would perhaps not drive a Greyhound bus, even in this far country, this interior America, but his head was large; bulging, an old, archaic dome of curled sculpture, and his eyes shone with gleamings of intensified, personal vision. He drove, in fact, erratically, perhaps because of the heavy mist which all but blotted out the asphalt road, the limitations, and more than once, with the bus's sudden lurching, I had feared that we might veer off into a ditch, that himself and his three passengers would be killed, our dismembered heads rolling in a cornfield of withered corn stalks. He had whistled with each new escape, had turned and smiled back over his shoulder with a kind of serene triumph, even when the bus had brushed against the sides of a lumbering moving van with furniture piled up almost to the low sky, an upright piano, a rocking chair, a clothes' horse, a woman's feathered hat bobbing at the top in the grey mist like some accompanying bird.

He is, after all, a bachelor, perhaps even some mad Don Quixote chasing windmills, a virgin spirit, nobody — as

A *manuscript page from Miss MacIntosh, My Darling*

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Marguerite Young
The Art of Fiction LXVI

Marguerite Young published her first collection of verse, Prismatic Ground, *in 1939. In 1945 came the double appearance of* Moderate Fable, *her last volume of verse, and* Angel in the Forest, *a history of two Utopian communities in New Harmony, Indiana, in the nineteenth century. Subsequently, portions of the novel to which she was to devote eighteen years,* Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, *began to appear in excerpt. The novel appeared in its entirety in 1965. In the late sixties she abandoned a near-completed life of James Whitcomb Riley to write a brief biography of her friend Eugene Debs, the first socialist candidate for the presidency which resulted in a large-scale study of Utopian and anti-Utopian trends.*

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She lives on a quiet tree-lined street in Greenwich Village. The walls of her apartment are painted red and lined with book cases. On one shelf the room is replicated in miniature sofas, miniature chairs set on easy rugs, lit by tiny lamps and chandeliers. The room in which we sat was dominated by a merry-go-round horse with ribbons streaming free from the pole that reached the ceiling. A life-sized antique doll was seated in a Victorian chair, exquisitely dressed in lace. Miss Young placed an ashtray within easy reach. She smoked continuously. Her voice has a mid-western flavor, sometimes drawling, sometimes rapid.

YOUNG

I was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, "the Athens of the West," as it had been called in an earlier day. That was when Booth Tarkington, Meredith Nicholson, James Whitcomb Riley, various writers of the old Hoosier group lived there. We were brought up to believe that to be born in Indiana was to be born a poet—a myth which I can't accept now, but I did then. I remember telling my grandmother, when I was about seven years old, that I intended to be a poet.

INTERVIEWER

She had a literary sensibility, didn't she?

YOUNG

She was a very beautiful, gifted, artistic personality. She painted, she wrote poems. She would never think of publishing. I don't think that she even thought of herself as frustrated. She was a woman who could have been a surgeon, a poet, anything. She was a genius personality.

INTERVIEWER

I know when you were an adolescent your grandmother became ill and that was when you yourself had to assume responsibility.

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YOUNG

She had a series of strokes the last year or two of her life. She would speak in a semi-hallucinated way to me and my little sister. We were left to hear these wild hallucinatory statements, and yet maintain a sense of equilibrium, with no one's help. As I remember her now, there were many beautiful speeches; it was like Lear on the heath. She was not mad; she was just in a state between dream and reality, knowing that she was going to die, and speaking and dancing at the edge of her grave.

INTERVIEWER

You mentioned Lear—was it rage?

YOUNG

No! Never! It was always poetic and cosmic. It had a great deal to do with angels and unearthly creatures: I know there were Angels in the House. Of course, I had always been taught there were Angels, and if you did anything wrong, you were to say, "Get thee behind me Satan" . . . and I was always whirling around to try to catch Satan as he was getting behind me. When she died, I imagined she would call on Anatole France in Heaven. She had introduced me to him along with Dickens, Eliot, Adam Bede and Victor Hugo, but it was Anatole France I truly loved, I read all of him, his work in French, and when my grandmother died my first thought was, oh well, now she can tell Anatole France that she has a little granddaughter on Earth who adores him. I really believed that she would tell him this. I missed her so much. It was the first death I ever knew. If I had been sure I could find her and Anatole France, I would have joined them.

INTERVIEWER

Anaïs Nin tells the story of your attempting to commit suicide.

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YOUNG

Which time? I never really attempted to commit suicide. I used to think about committing suicide when I was about eighteen. I had it worked out that I would do it in multiple ways, all at once. It would take place in a tree-house overlooking the river: I would put a rope around my neck, take poison, shoot myself, and fall into the river all at once. I think I worked this out because of Dorothy Parker's poem "ropes give . . . "—all these reasons suicide was so difficult. Also I had heard about Cowper's various attempts to commit suicide and how he was frustrated in every one. So I figured out a way to do it. It was not surprising. At the age of eighteen all young poets are sure they will be dead at 21—of old age.

INTERVIEWER

Did your grandmother make you write as a game, or an exercise? Did she direct you?

YOUNG

She praised my writing, and knew from when I began to pick up a pencil, that I would be a writer. She said I would be either a writer, or the first woman president of the United States, or that I would become a lawyer who would work to restore the lost family fortune. There were so many lost family fortunes that my little sister and I used to be afraid of kidnappers who would kidnap us for our golden crowns—although, of course, we were not rich, but we didn't know that.

INTERVIEWER

If your grandmother was the great personal influence, the geographical impact was Indiana, wasn't it? Indiana is the center of all your subsequent writing. But you are more interested in the psychology of character than you are in landscape, aren't you? You do not have that love of the prairie grasses and the low horizon line of Willa Cather, for example?

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YOUNG

No. It was my fate to be born in Indiana. I probably would have chosen Edinburgh if you had asked me, or perhaps Rome. But I believe we start with what we are, as writers, and Indiana is a land rich in legend. I tried to transmute this legend into a universal and cosmic statement of some kind, and not be strictly a regionalist. If you are asking me if I love nature, I could not really say that I do. I love the sea and the sand, but I am not a person who just loves nature. Yet, I write about it continually, because I am interested in the birds and the beasts for their symbolic value—their value as icons, as ways of saying things about people. As a poet, I have been an expert in that realm, studying birds and beasts from Heroclitus onward, and I love the old bestiaries. I wrote my master's thesis at the University of Chicago on the birds and beasts of Eupheus—his England—and for that, I had to study the history of every bird and beast there ever was.

INTERVIEWER

Do you like the work of Cather and the regionalist writers?

YOUNG

No, not particularly. I like Willa Cather; I don't love her. I love Mark Twain because he had this cosmic, dark, brooding pessimism. I love Theodore Dreiser.

INTERVIEWER

For what reasons? Their portrayal of characters? Their study of psychology?

YOUNG

Mainly because they were great thinkers, great dreamers, who happened to come from the Middle West.

INTERVIEWER

So, you make a distinction between regionalist writers and those who adopted an international style?

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YOUNG

I have always said that Southern writers seem to be born to sing. They live in small towns where they hear the most beautiful balladry everyday from their own people and from the black people. I have lived in Southern towns in the very heart of Kentucky and Tennessee. I have always envied Southern writers because experience is so accessible to them. But the Middle West is more prosperous and more middle-class. If you are going to be a writer from the Midwest, you have to become highly sophisticated, highly educated, in order to interpret that land. You cannot be just a natural-born singer —I could not imagine anything less possible. I think the Middle West begets bizarre, beautiful writers who have been dipped and dyed in education.

INTERVIEWER

Did you feel the urge to go abroad to develop your talent, like other writers of your generation, such as Henry Miller, Anaïs Nin, Malcolm Lowry, Gertrude Stein, Fitzgerald, Hemingway? They went to Paris, to Mexico, even to Hollywood.

YOUNG

No. I felt the urge to go by mule's back to the mountains of Tennessee, collecting ballads, old Scottish ballads. I was very much an admirer of Stiff Thompson, the great ballad authority who was a professor at Indiana University. Those people you mention were so far away. I never thought of them. They were like people of another planet. I was never a person who ever, then or now, watched what other writers do. During the depressed thirties, I was at the University of Chicago studying the Elizabethans and the Jacobeans, and then I became inolved with *Angel in the Forest.* I had lived in and out of many Kentucky and Tennessee towns and had become very much fascinated by the individual history of each, such as Horse Cave, Kentucky, and the graveyards in

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those towns. So, you might say that I was a graveyard poetess at that time.

INTERVIEWER

Did you go to New Harmony specifically to research the town for *Angel in the Forest?*

YOUNG

I never did any research whatever on New Harmony. My mother and stepfather moved there and they called me. They said, "You'll love this new town. It is the scene of two lost Utopias and it has in it the footprints of the Angel Gabriel. It has cruciform shapes on the doors and a maze."

So I went there, and lived there for seven years, and gradually I began to write about it. But there was no artificial research, except for the experience of living there, and talking to the old-timers in that town. Some were in the party of Father Rapp who was the founder of the first Utopia. They loved him because he left visible evidence of his place, the cruciform, the maze; the sun-dial was the way people told time: there were no watches in evidence until the railroad came to the land.

INTERVIEWER

You were going to write a series of poems?

YOUNG

I started with a series of sixty ballads, in a Robert Browning manner, since I was a poet and interested in balladry. I was unique in my interest. I hardly ever saw another writer. In Indiana, you are one thousand miles away from the next writer. I still do not watch what other writers do. Knowing the most recent vogue in literature is not the source of my creative strength. In fact, if I knew there was a vogue, I would avoid it.

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INTERVIEWER

But isn't it tempting to follow the fashion of the day, to become involved in the literary movements?

YOUNG

In the Middle West we didn't know flocks of writers. Each writer was isolated, and thus he developed an inner vision. One read on a vast scale. It was not as if we were sitting around in cafes talking about literary movements. That would have been beyond imagination.

INTERVIEWER

How much influence, or instruction, can one expect from one's peers?

YOUNG

I once visited Thornton Wilder's writing class at the University of Chicago. He had a habit of smoking in class which one was not supposed to do, and when somebody approached he would put his cigarettes in the desk drawer . . . and I remember one time the desk catching fire. I recall only one thing he said in that class . . . to remember above all things "the patient loves his malady."

I remembered that when I began *Miss MacIntosh*. . . . I fully thought it would take two years. If I had known it would take eighteen years I would have dropped in holy horror. Who could conceive spending eighteen years obsessed by one book and working from nine to five? I was pleased that when the book came out, a reviewer said, "When Miss Young finished her *Miss MacIntosh, My Darling,* she must have been as happy as when Sir Philip Sidney took the manuscript of 'Arcadia' and threw it at his sister's feet and said, 'There it is, it's finished.' "

INTERVIEWER

You are interested in psychology, but you are not interested in personality. You have often said that.

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YOUNG

Peculiarly enough, as a person, I am not interested much in individuals, even my closest friends. They could have deep secrets, and I would never ask them to tell me. As a writer, I would never spend pages analyzing the love life of a character. I have a muralist imagination. I like to see the epic swing of the thing, the many as opposed to the one. I am a pluralist in that sense.

INTERVIEWER

That is very much William James' concept of the imagination.

YOUNG

Yes, and it is also my temperament. It was true of *Angel in the Forest* when I was writing of the Utopian society, true of *Miss MacIntosh* when I had surrounded her with every kind of individual pathology of which I had ever heard or known, and true in my present biographies, where the central figures are surrounded by vast numbers of characters. Through them, you see the neurosis unfolding, everything unfolding, in relation to society as a whole. I could not, like Gide, sit and think about the troubles of one person—it would bore me to death. It would bore me to death in real life too.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a concept of how to portray character?

YOUNG

Yes. According to the logic of a pathology working itself out in strange, unusual and ultimate ways, which are recognizable, true to life, and which are always based on people whom either I have known, or more likely have read about in the daily newspapers.

INTERVIEWER

You get your concepts from newspapers?

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YOUNG

I get my characters from the newspapers, and from biographies and medical histories, and a thousand sources. I believe, like Browning, that the poet is a reporter. I can understand his writing, for instance, that beautiful long poem "The Ring and the Book," which was based on a real murder in Rome. I do not believe in inventing characters.

INTERVIEWER

Is the Opium Lady a real person?

YOUNG

I knew an Opium Lady while I was a student at the University of Chicago, and with whom I spent much time, reading aloud the works of Shakespeare. That is how I worked my way through school.

INTERVIEWER

Who was she?

YOUNG

She had been under opium for about fifteen or twenty years and had not walked for at least ten years. She was one of the original patronesses of *Poetry,* "A Magazine of Verse," and of Jane Addam's Hull-House. She was also a friend of Thornton Wilder, Harriet Monroe, and many of the other intellectuals of that day. I was with her during her opium dreams. I was with her when the golden bird, who was the spirit of Heroclitus, perched upon the bedpost. I was literally with her when she had a long conversation with the head of John the Baptist.

INTERVIEWER

After decapitation?

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YOUNG

After decapitation. I was also there when she spoke with a little rabbit. I was with her when she entertained an imaginary elephant, and when blue fish would be floating over her bed. I began to write my novel quite unexpectedly. I had planned to write a biography of Toulouse L'Ouverture, the Haitian rebel, but my publisher wanted me to write a novel . . . she was the most fabulous, single person I had ever known. I was interested in her for her dreams and her beautiful personality and surroundings.

INTERVIEWER

And the problems of opium addiction?

YOUNG

No. The doctors in her household were always rushing about with Elizabeth Barrett Browning letters to try to explain this beautiful opium lady who was their patient. She *was* like an Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whom, of course, I had read, along with DeQuincy's *Confessions of An Opium Eater*. I had read Coleridge, too.

INTERVIEWER

So that you would understand her?

YOUNG

No. All this was in my background before I ever arrived. Her house was just right for a young poet. There couldn't have been a better place. I was offered opium every evening. But I always said "No, thanks," and for that reason, she used to call me the "prosaic sprite," because I didn't need drugs to dream. I stayed with her most of the time. I was offered the bed in which Edna St. Vincent Millay had slept, when she was a visitor in Chicago, and the idea of sleeping in Millay's bed—it would mean nothing to me now, but at *that* age . . . it seemed to be the most marvelous thing that could ever

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happen to any young person. On the Opium Lady's bed-side was a silver drinking cup which had belonged to John Keats, a little mosaic Persian letter set, and a beautiful bird with a sea shell. I have these things at my bed-side now. Her daughter gave them to me when she died.

INTERVIEWER

You did not enter the Opium Lady's dreams?

YOUNG

I do not think she dreamed about people. She dreamed about mandarins and human-sized blackbirds standing in the hallways, or invisible elephants. Adlai Stevenson—he may have known her, by the way—talked about the invisible elephant when he was running for office. I don't know if he ever got a letter I wrote him, telling him about the invisible elephant in the Opium Lady's dreams. He had the same idea: that the thing you think is not there may be there.

INTERVIEWER

But now you are talking about an individual, and yet you say you are not interested in individuals.

YOUNG

I met Thornton Wilder several years later at a Gotham Book Mart party, and he asked me what I had been doing. I said that I was writing a novel in which the Opium Lady was one of the leading characters. He said, "Oh! As a way of revealing the unconscious." He knew exactly what the theme would be. It was the unconscious that interested me. I say that I am not interested in people, but I *am* interested in the bizarre and in people at an edge. I am interested in extreme statements about people because that is where drama is most apparent. Being a Scot and economical about my working so hard, I begin with what I know is easy—with something strange and beautiful which then starts to activate itself. When you start with the normal or the neutral or the average,

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it becomes difficult. I *imagine* it does, anyway—I have never tried it and I never will.

INTERVIEWER

Did you have to do research for such characters as the nursemaid?

YOUNG

No. Not for *Miss MacIntosh*, because I knew all these things, or had observed them.

INTERVIEWER

What about the love story with the deaf man?

YOUNG

Well, I knew this stone-deaf man in Greenwich Village who was, in fact, a close friend of mine. He was most interesting because of his brilliant mind and missing sense. He was a painter. I put him in my novel because he was a sensual contrast to some of the other characters. He was a perfect lover for Vera Cartwheel in the end because I figured she could not marry a man who was absolutely normal—she would be bored to death after what she had been through. So, she ends up by marrying a man whose hearing was missing. So often I get stimulating ideas for my characters from what is actually happening in the world. I always read the newspapers. Sometimes events happen *after* I write about them. You'll remember that I had Miss MacIntosh walk into the sea, stark-naked except for a pair of black gloves (which she had carefully darned the night before) as if she were going to her wedding, all of her clothes left along the beach, including her red wig on the back of a horseshoe crab, and her Admiral Dewey corset, and her sea boots, and her plaid mackintosh. . . walking into the sea at dawn, when both sun and moon were in the sky, carrying her black umbrella, until her bald head reached sea level. Later I read about a boy in

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northern Long Island, who was stark naked except for a pair of black gloves, and who walked into the black sea. The fact that such a bizarre thing happened *after* I wrote about it made me feel that I was psychologically correct in the kind of death I had imagined for Miss MacIntosh. Of course, that death was originally based, in part, upon the death of Virginia Woolf who had walked into the River House in England.

INTERVIEWER

What is the psychological significance of that "gloved" death?

YOUNG

Well, I wondered about that myself. I used to distrust my imagination for fear that I was simply fantasizing. But I thought I knew what I meant, and when I consulted with my friend Dr. Hammershlagd, the psychiatrist, he explained the entire case—the meanings of the word black, and the gloves, in relation to psychology and guilt and why it was the correct image. Similarly, when I had the detective in the novel who would not handle a case in which anything black appears—a black rooster or the ace of spades—I thought, well, I must have gone mad to imagine such a character. I asked Dr. Hammershlagd again and he said, "Well, that is a classic case of schizophrenia," and he gave me a long series of similar case histories.

INTERVIEWER

Scribner's commissioned *Miss MacIntosh* but it took you eighteen years to finish it. Did you get side-tracked in the writing of the book?

YOUNG

No. They commissioned me in 1944 to write it. I submitted about fifteen pages of it, that is all. Mainly, they gave me the contract on the basis of *Angel in the Forest* and my

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poetry book, *Moderate Fables*. I did not know I began it that it would be such a long novel. I had all the major characters in my head the first day, and I knew the theme of the book would be an inquest into the illusions individuals suffer from. I had already written a book about the illusions society suffers from in Utopian states, and I wanted to shift from the society to the individual. I thought it would take two years and perhaps the book would be about two hundred pages long. But the book started expanding because my characters became increasingly lively, and more interesting to me on so many levels. I had chosen very rich characters to being with, who were capable of development, and I had the patience to allow them *to* develop. I was enchanted by the whole project. I hear music when I am writing, and I worked from nine to five, for what was to be eighteen years of breathless writing. I never stopped. I was never bored. If I was bored, I would have stopped. I realized somewhere along the line, early, that it would take a long time. I wanted it to be a book of books, a song of songs. I knew for sure that nothing else in life was going to interfere: I would not easily marry, I would not easily travel. I wanted to write this book—and I don't regret it.

INTERVIEWER

How do you get started in the morning?

YOUNG

I always leave off the day before, as Thomas Mann advised, "When the going is good . . . ," when you know exactly where you are, and you are in a moment of exuberance; you stop. When I hook on the next morning, if the going was good, I just go. I feel it emotionally, almost in the blood, the pulse, the excitement. I always hear inner music when I write; I hear strange music. I have all my life, which is very odd, because I am not at all musical.

INTERVIEWER

Dreams are also a strong influence, aren't they?

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YOUNG

Once I dreamed that I was in Iowa City at a party in my house. Henry James was there and he was sitting in a corner, pouring whiskey into his high silk hat. Two weeks later, I came to New York, and on Seventh Avenue I found a book, "Memories, by a Publisher's Wife," in which I read, "Henry James was here the other evening, and was so drunk that he sat in a corner, pouring whiskey into his high silk hat." It was a very obscure little memoir, and I had never read it, or heard of it, or even dreamed that Henry James would take a drink. But I do believe that there are visitations in dreams. He would come to me in my dreams, night after night, during the writing of *Miss MacIntosh,* and read what I had done. Sometimes I was typing, and sometimes writing in longhand, beautiful pages (which of course faded from my mind), and he used to say, "That's beautiful . . . go right ahead . . . go right ahead . . . you're the late twentieth century development of what I was doing," and things like that. Which I don't think I am, of course, but in my dreams I thought so.

INTERVIEWER

You've often said that you feel the presence of other writers.

YOUNG

When I'm teaching, I often say, "Come in, Mr. James . . ." My students love this. I will stop . . . "Oh, how do you do Henry James, won't you be seated." Oh, they all look, they think he's really there. Boswell will come; Cervantes, I spend a great deal of time with him. I entertain: I see Emily Dickinson, quite often, Virginia Woolf and Dickens. Poe, oh . . . all the time. I see him on misty nights on Sheridan Square, when the rain's falling; he's going into that little cigar store to get a cigar. I am on very close terms with Poe. Now rationally I don't believe all of this, but in an irrational way, I live it all, so what can we say?

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INTERVIEWER

I know you have this theory that individuals speak through many voices. Do you see most people as possible writers?

YOUNG

No. Most people are not, though I think talent is fairly common. I see innumerable talents in my teaching of fiction-writing at Fordham University and the New School of Social Research and Seton Hall. I see much talent. But so many of them will be lawyers, or bridge builders. Many of them will think they are going to write, but will be turned aside by fate.

INTERVIEWER

One must have incredible desire in addition to the talent.

YOUNG

I met Norman Mailer at a cocktail party after *Miss MacIntosh* was published. I had never seen him before. He came up to me and said, "Were there any fighters in your family?" I answered, "Why yes. My half-brother was a champion in the ring." "I knew it," he said, "I knew you had a fighter in the family." "Well, what made you think that?" I asked. He said, "Because it took a lot of strength hanging out in the sawdust ring like that, punching away for eighteen years the way you did." Then he wrote to my publisher to say I was a "gentle Hercules in high-heels." My publisher's publicity department gave that letter to a cartoonist at the Herald Tribune who did it up and showed it to me—a cartoon of me punching it out with Mailer with that caption, "a gentle Hercules in high-heels." So Mailer was congratulating me for the stamina of spending so many years on a novel. I suppose it took stamina in a way: but it takes stamina to write anything for eighteen minutes.

—CHARLES RUAS

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Two Poems by Tom Wayman

Ten Years

Ten years on the road: I move into the fast lane
at the approach of a long rise
to swing by a Ford tractor-trailer
hauling new lumber. A decade now
of driving around.

I get back
in the other lane. It's my third car
in this time, but the freeways
still soar across the earth
through the early Spring fields
with white houses and grey barns
perched on the hillsides.

Three cars, and I've lived with
twice that many women.
And two nights ago
I talked for hours and hours with another
and later when we were finished and sleepy
she pulled my arms around her in the bed
and put my hands on her breasts
and fell asleep like that, content.

So I lay awake all night
looking at her in the dim room,
worried about the heat my furnace of a body
gives off, but each time she changed position
nearly awake, she would pull my arms
once more around her.

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In ten years, this was the first
who didn't want to curl into herself
for most of the night
but wanted me then, too. So I held her
all night in the darkness,
happy and thinking.

Ahead of me a station wagon
slows to exit for a rest area. I signal
and change lanes and pass,
the roadside mileage reading 170 to go
when I get back into the other lane again.

New Year's at Ken Tyler Graphics, Route 22 Near Mt. Kisco, New York

for P.

i
"We say stone has a memory," Rodney says.
"I can pull a number of prints from one
and grain it off, and later perhaps do something else with it
and grain it off, and then months afterwards I'll be printing
a third time
and some of the image from the first run
might surface in what I'm doing.

"It's spooky, but it's one way
stone is more flexible than metal. You don't think of it,
since a stone could weigh as much as a thousand pounds
and you can roll a metal plate up
and stick it under your arm. But the memory is useful
if you make a mistake: with stone
you can almost always get the image back, but metal
doesn't remember. Also,

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zinc likes grease and doesn't like water
so when you're printing the darker tones
zinc plates tend to fill in to black
since they can't hold the water to keep the image open.
Aluminum, on the other hand,
likes water and doesn't like grease
which means that the lighter values won't be held.
Stone likes grease and water equally
which gives you the widest possible range of tones.

"Lithography began with stones from a certain quarry in
Germany
which still produces the best ones.
But when the metal technology was developed
everyone switched to plates. After the war,
people like Ken began using stones again.
He got some by driving around to old print shops
where they had ones they hadn't touched in forty years.
Now I'm told the original quarry has reopened
since there's money in it once more.
In the meantime, though,
the guys who knew most about techniques with stone
have died off. So there are secrets of working with stone
that are lost, and it's in places like this
they'll be rediscovered."

ii
We walk single file across the snow
into the wildlife sanctuary
behind Tyler's,
keeping an eye out for deer
as we follow an old road
through the straw-colored brush
against the white snow, and the trees'
trunks, limbs and twigs
scratched against the backdrop
of other trees, the wide wooded river valley,

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blue sky and the snow
like the dozens of thin lines
etched on a copper plate Rodney showed us
he had been working on before Christmas.

And in all directions through the forest
low stone fences rise out of the snow:
parallel to the path, or crossing each other at right angles
to end at the edge of the road.
Low stone, old stone, remembering something
of the poor who settled these woods:
the first farmers, and the Indians.

iii
"Ken designed this press himself," Rodney says.
"There's nothing like it anywhere in the world
except for the ones he had built for the shop in Los Angeles
before he moved here to Westchester. It will take either
a stone or a plate: Ken has the idea
and then he gets together with some engineers
and they all work on it. It's amazing.
And that's a machine Ken thought up
that will automatically grain and level any stone.

"The studio hasn't always looked like this.
When I came, those presses were over there.
When we take on a new project
Ken rearranges the place. So it never gets boring.
If Ken likes what an artist is doing
he'll invite them to come in and work. Or,
someone like Oldenburg or Motherwell
might approach Ken with a concept they want to try.
That whole addition was just finished
to house a giant silkscreen for Frank Stella.
It's 12 feet by 9, the largest non-commercial screen
ever made. The paper is held on the bed
with suction from vacuum pumps;
when it's going, it would lay you out flat on the table.

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"When I started here, I was nervous
because of not having had a lot of experience.
But so much of what we take on, as Ken says,
nobody has done before anyway
so we figure it out ourselves.
Or, often if we're helping someone with a new scheme
anybody's pair of hands would do."

iv
And Tyler the next day, Sunday,
getting up from his desk to show us
work Hockney did in L.A.: rain
driving into puddles, a fog at night
turned into scarlet dots by neon, and wind
over a green freeway sign, blowing
these prints and two others away. Tyler pulling out
the last of an earlier Stella project
where colored pulps were poured over mahogany molds
covered during the process with brass mesh
that had to be sewn together by hand.
Each print: $4,000. And a newer run:
Entablatures by Lichtenstein: litho and silkscreen
and metal foil.

"It's so expensive," Rodney says later.
"It can get pretty strange when people show up to buy.
Once we had some South Americans appear unannounced,
stay about an hour,
and spend a briefcase full of money.
I was thinking about that the other day
when I had to take some prints into the City to be signed.
I probably had $50,000 worth right there in my truck."

v
And that night
in Rodney's apartment above the print shop
we listen to the radio show from the City

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he hears each week: four hours every Sunday
of *doo-wop* music—the long vanished groups
singing syllables behind a lead,
their sound out of the early 50s, just before rock-and-roll.
Now their work is preserved
only in a rare personal collection
or a recording company's archives,
their value increasing
as the discs become harder to find.
The featured groups this evening
are the "Dreamweavers" and the "DuoTones"
and I can't remember either.

But the room holds a beat
I have lived amid all my life.
Outside, in the country blackness,
the snow falls steadily into the woods
onto the cold stone.
Here over the silent studio
I sit with my mind full of words
and music, headed into another year
still excited by how much there is to know.

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Sam Abrams

The Laws

I

they have no gathering places
    for taking of council nor
agreements
but they inhabit crowns of
    high mountains
in their caves each one rules
his children & wives nor do they take
care of one another

states like this do sometimes come into existence then?

did they not originate with those people who lived scattered
in families and by single households on account of inability
to do anything else in the midst of catastrophes?

and probably next they congregate into greater numbers and
form larger droves and first they turn to farming on the
hillsides and make ringfences of dry stone and protective
walls on account of the wild beasts and construct at the
same time a single large common dwelling?

II

a man that has wounded his own woman out of an intent to kill
or a woman that has her own man
let them be exiled for life
if they have a son or daughter still children
the guardians shall guard them as if they were orphans
and care for them
if the children be grown
they must support their exiled parents
and they shall get their possessions

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if any person overtaken by such a disaster be childless
the kin on both sides
both male and female
as far as cousins' children
shall meet together
and they shall appoint a holder for the house
and they shall take council with the students of the laws
and they shall bear in mind this principle
that no house of the 5040 belongs as much
either by private or public right
to the occupier
or to his whole family
as it belongs to the community
and the community must needs keep its house as holy & happy
as possible
they shall be bound according to the custom
to make purifications and expiations for the house
and as we said just now
meet together with the students of the laws
and consider what family there is in the community
that is well reputed for goodness & happiness
and containing several children

then from the family selected
they shall adopt one child
on behalf of the dead or exiled parents' ancestors
and they shall name him after one of them
with a prayer
that he may prove to them a begetter of offspring
a hearth master
and a minister in holy and sacred things
and that he be blessed with happier fortune than his parents

III

land occupied and owned by other people
cannot be acquired simply by conquest or purchase
for if this were done and the former owners dispossessed
they believe that the spirits of the owners

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would make it impossible for them
to carry on their agricultural activities
with any chance of success

if a wanderobo family wished
to part with portion of its hunting zone
in return for payment
the kikuyu would suggest
that the two families should undertake
a ceremony of mutual adoption

once the two families had been united
there would be no fear of treachery by either party
it would make possible the solemn religious ceremonies
which form an important part of the actual transfer
and make the departed spirits of the wanderobo family
members of the kikuyu family spirit group
so these wanderobo spirits
would be amicably disposed toward the kikuyu
when they took over the land

IV

a girl who found herself unwed
had the right to do kuheera
she would look around for a married man
with who she felt that life as a second wife would be bearable
and then one night betake herself uninvited to his hut
and offer herself to him
if he took her in and fucked her
it became incumbent on him to make her his junior wife

the words "his hut" need some explanation
and in that explanation lies yet another reason
why the changes that have taken place
with the coming of modern european customs
have caused so much mental unrest and instability

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by kikuyu custom
when a man first married
he built a hut for his wife
and started up a new homestead and household
at the beginning
and before his wife had her first child
this might be the only hut
but he was expected as soon as possible
and anyhow before the birth of the first baby
to build a second hut in his new homestead
thingira—the man's hut
the first hut—nyumba—was the sanctum of his wife
and tho he could visit her in her nyumba
and fuck with her there
he could not take his own visitors there
without her consent
if later he married a second wife
the new wife had to have a nyumba of her own
while the man had his own thingira
where he entertained his male friends
and where his wife or wives could bring food
for himself and his guest
but where his wife
once legally married to him
would not on any account fuck or sleep

the new types of housing used by the kikuyu
do not consist of separate huts
but of a different type of house altogether
divided into rooms
but this does not give the privacy that
separate huts in a single homestead afforded
and in consequence polygamy under the new conditions
creates much jealousy and ill feeling
where before it seldom did

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lest some think that the kikuyu system
gives to male partners of the marriage an unfair advantage
that of having his own hut
where a girl could come to visit him and be his lover
let it be said at once
that within the marriage bond
a kikuyu woman too had a measure of freedom
and could invite a lover of her own choice to her hut
without her husband having the right to say her nay
or to accuse her of unfaithfulness
provided that he was one of her husband's initiation class
and provided always
that she later told him openly that she had done so
just as he was expected to tell his wife
of any female visitors he had entertained in his thingira

V

after lighting the fire
each man steps up to his rockpile
and using a small sharpened stick
jabs at his subincised penis
until the wound is reopened

when the blood flows freely
it is sprinkled over the rockpile

this accomplished
each man stands for a few minutes by his fire
to let the heat dry the wound
and slow the flow of blood

here they say is where the two watersnakes came in the
dreamtime
after collecting and eating large quantities of sweet yellow wama
and they became sick at this place
and vomited out the contents of their stomachs on the ground
the wama they vomited turned to stone in the dreamtime

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becoming the piles of yellow rock
where the men sprinkled penis blood today
the watersnakes accomplished this transformation by themselves
and today the spirit of these ancestral beings is alive
and resides in the rockpiles
the fires have no symbolic importance
but the sprinkling of penis blood is just like rain
in its importance in causing the grevillea flowers
the source of wama to ripen
and the plants to multiply

all members of this cult lodge
whether they have their actual dreaming here
or act on behalf of relatives
have the sacred duty to perform this rite annually
if possible / by doing so
they temporarily reenter the dreamtime
and the rockpiles become part of their own being
and even when they are not performing the ritual
a direct relationship exists between the men and the rockpiles
their general duties include
keeping the area around the rockpiles clean
seeing that the piles themselves are kept intact
and of course
deciding on suitable novices to instruct in the traditions

anthropologists refer to rituals of this kind as increase
ceremonies
this however is a misnomer
as the participants are simply concerned
to maintain the supplies of the natural species at their usual
level
to support
the normal
order
of
nature

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The above photograph was taken on a nippy day (judging from the apparel) outside the Café Tournon, which was a favorite hangout on the Rue Tournon just by the Jardin de Luxembourg, and shows many of the writers living in Paris who contributed either to The Paris Review, *or to the excellent, if short-lived, publication* Merlin. *The time was either late 1954, or early '55, a lack of precision which I am afraid continues with the identification of the subjects. I cannot remember a couple of them. Seated in the front row, from left to right, are Vilma Howard, poet; Jane Lougee, the publisher of* Merlin; *Muffy Wainhouse, the wife of Austryn Wainhouse; Jean Garrigue, poet. In the second row are Christopher Logue (with the cigarette), poet and* Merlin *editor; Richard Seaver, then associated with* Merlin, *who subsequently became the editor of* Evergreen Review; *Evan S. Connell (with the moustache), novelist; Niccolo Tucci, essayist and novelist. I can't remember the woman with the sunny smile, nor, alas, the gentleman in the trenchcoat behind her. Peter Huyn, poet, translator, editor, is standing next to the mystery lady; the row is completed by Alfred Chester, novelist and short story writer, and Austryn Wainhouse, novelist, translator, and at the time a* Merlin *editor. In the last row, from left to right, are three* Paris Review *editors— Eugene Walter, a short story writer associated with a number of literary magazines including* Botteghe Oscure *and* Transatlantic; *GAP (with hat); and William Pêne du Bois, author and illustrator of children's books (rising like a moon behind the shoulder of the mystery gent in the trenchcoat). Du Bois was the art editor of* The Paris Review. *Next to him are James Broughton, poet and film maker; William Gardner Smith, novelist; and a gentleman I believe is Harold Witt, poet.*

Norman Glass' reminiscence which follows concerns Alfred Chester, the small schoolboy figure in the second row with his face half in shadow. On that day the sun must have illuminated his wig, which never seemed to fit properly and which was a bright orange. He was an exceptional writer . . . author of a fine novel entitled Jamie Is My Heart's Desire, *and short stories which found their way from the literary quarterlies into the 'best short-story' anthologies. What Mr. Glass has written about him is condensed from a much longer piece.*

G.A.P.

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Chronicle

The Decline and Fall of Alfred Chester

Norman Glass

In the summer of 1963, the kingdom of Morocco had not yet become infested with tourists, hippies and freaks. I didn't land as a pioneer, of course, but neither did I follow in the wake of fashion. I could step adventurously upon the shore believing that I had arrived through personal and independent choice.

It was at the coastal town of Asillah, some twenty miles southwest of Tangier, that I first met Alfred Chester. The clean, narrow cobbled streets of the small elegant medina were deserted. Low, flat-roofed, whitewashed houses loomed ahead, a maze of secretive cubes. There was a long and low dusty pink rampart wall which had once served to protect the citizens from pirate raids. Laden with the odor of jasmine, a breeze fondled the boughs of the palm trees. Through the night I walked untroubled and enchanted until I glimpsed a weird apparition. Not until I took a few hesitant steps forward did I recognize it as a flesh and blood figure. Although Alfred and I had already been introduced to each

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other by Paul Bowles, this was the first time I had ever really looked at him. Short and round, he was sitting alone on the parapet; with his large legs crossed he was kicking his heels peevishly against the wall. He looks just like Humpty-Dumpty, I thought.

"And where do you think you're going?" he snarled in a Brooklyn accent.

"Where am I going? . . . Back to my hotel," I replied, surprised rather than offended.

"You're not going any further until you tell me why you've been avoiding me," he said in a churlish voice. Had he been waiting to ambush me? I suspected that he had.

"I haven't been avoiding you," I lied.

"Yes, you have," he shouted. "And I want to know why. You can't get away, I've had my eye on you for a long time." I looked at Alfred's eyes. Set deep in their sockets, small, slanted, Mongolian, they were pale blue-grey, watchful, shrewd and cunning.

"All right, then, I'll tell you." I was beginning to feel antagonistic myself. "As a rule, I don't make friends with anyone who doesn't appeal to me aesthetically. I've been avoiding you," I said deliberately, "because I don't like the sight of your face."

"So *that's* the reason," he said thoughtfully. Oddly enough, my words hadn't displeased him at all.

"Well, I'll tell *you* something now," he resumed cheerfully. "You're hardly an Adonis yourself, but you're the first honest individual I've met in these parts, and I appreciate that. Not that honesty will ever get you anywhere in this world, mark my words. Come on," he said, jumping down from the ramparts and slapping his pants clean, "let's get going, whether you like the sight of my face or not. Here we are, two little white men alone in Black Africa, we have to be friendly . . . Stanley and Livingstone all over again. Just like when I was in Veracruz with. . . ."

Although Alfred had emerged from his autocratic shell, he did not remain convivial for long. He reverted to his former

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tone. Snarling, growling, barking, rasping, snapping, spitting out his words, he often left me wondering whether his animosity was directed against the topic at hand, himself, me, or the entire world. Clearly, however, he was talking under pressure, he was tormented and did not enjoy the sound of his own voice. At times, oblivious of my company, he would interrupt and answer himself, leaping from one subject to another in wild ellipsis.

By two particular subjects Alfred was preoccupied to the point of being obsessed: Paul Bowles, and his own career. He had waylaid me, he explained, in order to find out whether Bowles had warned me not to frequent him. He knew that I visited Bowles regularly at the house which he had rented for the summer; it happened to be quite close to his own.

"And you're sure he hasn't said anything to you about me?" Alfred asked suspiciously.

"I assure you that he hasn't."

"So he just talks about the mineral silence of the Sahara, I suppose, and plays those Cecil Taylor tapes. How very dull!" he concluded. A feud had sprung up apparently between Bowles and Alfred owing to Bowles' failure to provide him with a couple of blankets: a trivial enough incident, it was to have dramatic repercussions.

With regard to his own career Alfred presented himself as one *"che fece . . . il gran rifiuto."* He had fled New York's literary jungle, despising the vulgar publicity tricks and the sordid struggle for power. He described a world in which one had to be a gangster or a film star in order to become a successful writer.

"What has all that ass-licking got to do with truth and beauty?!" he exclaimed. Having lived for many years in Europe, he knew that the politics of writing could be conducted according to more civilized rules. As he readily acknowledged, however, his "great refusal" was mainly a geographical one; he had not broken away completely from New York, in a way he was only playing truant. He remained ambitious as a writer and was looking forward to the publi-

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cation of his next volume of short stories *Behold Goliath;* he was also writing monthly articles for the *Tribune.* Nevertheless he was sorely tempted to throw his whole career to the winds, succumb to the Moroccan landscape, and revel in a new and startling way of life. He seethed with contradictions and thrived upon antagonism.

"That's enough for now," he said abruptly. "Come round for tea tomorrow afternoon. What I like about you is that I can be myself with you, but you have to understand that I'm not looking for a friend; I just want to involve someone in my madness. Good night." Thereupon he left me. Humpty-Dumpty in a Dostoevsky novel, I thought, as I walked back to my hotel. Yet somehow quite endearing.

Alfred had settled down temporarily, with his two dogs, in a small, ramshackle house on the outskirts of the medina. Having rescued these animals, several years ago, from belligerant peasants on a Greek island, he had lived and travelled with them ever since. The black and white Columbine was big, scrawny and fierce, while her fawn-colored daughter Skoura was small, plump, and prone to epileptic fits. Neither of them ever felt too at ease indoors, they belonged to the woods, to wild places. Alfred was devoted to his dogs and saw aspects of himself in both of them.

When I arrived for tea, the next day, Columbine pounced forward barking raucously, while Skoura limped along behind her, drooling.

"Columbine, sit down! Skoura, come here, you poor thing! As for you, welcome!" Making my way cautiously up a short flight of slippery steps, I entered the main room. Littered with cushions, a few straw mats had been flung across the stone floor. Alfred was sitting at his working table on which resided his monumental, pre-war Underwood typewriter. The bedroom consisted of a small alcove with a lumpy mattress on the floor. The walls had been freshly painted skyblue and white, and both rooms were brimming with sunshine. Alfred started making tea, using a bundle of fragrant bright

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green mint, while I picked up, from the few available books, an old, worn edition of *The Guide For The Perplexed* by Moses Maimonides.

"You've chosen the right one," Alfred said with approval. He had been watching me.

"I started reading it a few months ago when I was in Paris," I said. "I put it aside when I reached the chapter about eccentric spheres and epicycles. The author's logic sounded so convincing and watertight until I realized it was all based on a false premise. Like Aristotle, Maimonides believed that . . ." But I wasn't allowed to finish my sentence. Lying among the cushions, Alfred began rolling around and pinching himself.

"Fee fi fo fum," he chanted, "I smell the brains of a pedantic Eng-lish-mun. I'll have you know," he added in a quiet but authoritative tone, "that the *Guide* abounds in wisdom which you may never perceive."

"But all that piety," I objected, "it reminds me too much of home and family."

"Beware of apostasy," he retorted. "If we stay away from the tribe for too long we may get lost in the desert and go insane."

"But. . ."

"Be quiet!" he said fiercely, and handed me a chipped glass of syrupy tea.

It was here in this house—I was to learn—that Alfred pursued his relationship with Driss. Referred to as "my breath's beloved" in a number of Alfred's *Tribune* pieces, and evoked as Larbi in one of his last published texts, *The Foot,* Driss was a native of Asillah who had formerly been a fisherman and a casual hustler. A tall, stalwart young man with handsomely proportioned limbs, he had a mean, brutal face, and a domineering manner. A braggart to begin with, he became, if not gentler and more sensitive, at least more house-trained as the months passed by. He could play football, marbles and cards; he could make magic spells and fill a *sebsi* full of *kief* using only his little finger; he could bargain for hours at the market and cook slapdash meals; he even learnt, when threatened

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with a reduction of pocket money, to keep Alfred company in the evenings. Despite the time they lived together, Driss displayed no intellectual curiosity at all; unlike many North-African Moslems, he never spoke with awe of "the men of books." It would have been difficult for Alfred to have found a more one-dimensional Moroccan. "One of these days I'm going to dump him on Times Square," he used to say, when he came to regret the lack of mental communication. But they were fated to remain together for nearly four years, if only because they were, as Driss often boasted, "the two craziest people in the whole of Morocco." From the outset Alfred publicized the relationship, not only in his writing, but also in piquant, daily gossip with friends; he was the first to perceive its comical ingredients and its inadequate basis. But Driss was well endowed where it can often matter most: he was also extremely potent. Alfred had not been living as a monk, of course, either in New York or during his European travels; but the kind of erotic satisfaction which Driss provided was unique in his experience. Moreover, Driss grew attached to Alfred, he really did desire him and he didn't seek to profit from him. Alfred was completely hairless from head to toe, his skin was perfectly smooth and pink. Driss was enchanted by a phenomenon of this kind, his appetite was never cloyed. "Fantastic," he confided to a curious friend. "Just like fucking a baby." Startled, at first, by his partner's insatiable appetite, Alfred learnt willingly enough to adapt himself. "Saying No is a sin," he used to chuckle. His indulgence didn't help him, however, to entertain a new image of himself within his consort's eyes; he failed to see himself as attractive and desirable. Only too often his erotic and emotional life was marked by confusion, panic and self-disgust.

In Asillah, for example, there lived a boy of exceptional beauty named Mohammed. Looking at him myself, I couldn't help but recall the face of Michaelangelo's *David*, and the body, with its voluptuous languor, of his *Bacchus*. One day, following a minor quarrel, Driss went to stay with some rela-

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tives in the country, while Alfred . . . well, here's how Alfred himself told it to me in the evening.

"Mohammed came round. The one you want to put in a museum. He'd never stay there for long, I'll have you know. A word about the football match, two words about the fishing season, then down he went on the mattress and took it out. A remarkable one, too, I'll have you know. *'Sienta ti,'* he said. Well, I wouldn't *sienta mi* just like that. I had to be sentimental and create a romantic atmosphere. Skoura had been shitting all over the place, so I cleaned up the mess, burned a little incense, switched off the light and lit a candle. And then . . . well, all you have to know is that it didn't take him half as long to do what he had to do as it had taken me to prepare the décor. Then off he ran with a handful of coins, making me swear that I'd never tell Driss. If I could earn a dollar with my pen as quickly as he earned one with his pen . . . is, I'd be as rich as Barbara Hutton by now," he concluded wistfully.

I was amused, but also disturbed. How could Alfred remain so insensitive to the boy's beauty? I wondered. It didn't seem judicious to couple with a godly form as though it were a goat.

On another occasion, Alfred drove in his pale blue, second-hand Austin to a small, rarely frequented beach. While he was undressing, a boy appeared from behind a nearby sand dune and hailed him by shouting out that he enjoyed Allah's bounty. *"And'k k'bir!"* ("I've got a big one!") Alfred didn't welcome the intrusion, and he told the boy to go away. But the boy insisted. "Look!" he cried. "I'm telling you the truth." Whereupon, Alfred gathered up his clothes and moved to another part of the beach, followed, however, by the boy, who apparently wasn't used to being spurned. Alfred started running. Annoyed by such surly conduct, the boy ran after him and let loose a volley of colorful oaths. "How dare you call me a liar, you deformed son of a Nazarene whore?!" Alfred's only reply was to increase his pace, hotly pursued by his wooer who now replaced the oaths by a

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shower of stones. Alfred fled towards his car, convinced—as he told me—that he risked being raped and dismembered.

I was amused (though Alfred wasn't), and once again was surprised, at Alfred's obvious misunderstanding of another's intentions, and his panic-stricken flight.

During his first months in Asillah Alfred tended to provoke trouble, for he believed, erroneously, that it wasn't necessary to practice discretion and diplomacy in a community where erotic friendships flourished among the natives themselves. He avoided being promiscuous, if only through fear of Driss, but he didn't hesitate to reveal his penchants, if only by—to employ the popular phrase—his heavy vibrations. The news spread about his phenomenal body. More than once, children pursued him playfully through the streets, chanting: *"Hassess! . . . Hassess! . . ."* ("Queen! . . . Queen! . . .") It isn't inconceivable that events of this kind contributed to his later conviction that he was being watched and persecuted.

Prone to sudden panic, Alfred was equally given to explosions of violent rage. I will select three memorable incidents.

Driss was hired officially as Alfred's cook; he was proud of his position and conscientious. On the first day he went out shopping, however, he decided to take certain elementary precautions; he didn't know his new employer well, and his previous encounters with foreign visitors had served mainly to increase his innate distrust for members of the non-Muslim world. He left the house quietly while Alfred was resting from his morning work. From inside an old shoe at the bottom of his big straw shopping basket he took a gimlet, a screwdriver, a handful of screws and a rusty but reliable padlock. A few minutes of dextrous carpentry enabled him to lock the front door. With Alfred safe at home, unable to seek mischief or be visited by it, Driss went calmly on his way to market. His errands done, he visited his friend the local chief of police. As they sipped mint tea and enjoyed a *sepsi* of *kief,* two young visitors arrived, and a game of cards was proposed. Although it was time to prepare Alfred's lunch, nobody had

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to persuade Driss to postpone his culinary duties. Indeed, in order to play a game of cards he would have arrived late at his own father's funeral. He lost the first round, even though he cheated. Not until he had won three rounds in succession did he recover from the injury to his pride and feel free to take leave of his friends. Besides, he was beginning to feel hungry himself. On his way back he was met by neighbors who informed him that the Nazarene was banging on the door like a madman and that the dogs were barking loud enough to prevent the moon from shining that night. Driss quickened his pace angrily. Not even a padlock on the door could prevent the Nazarene from misbehaving if he were left alone for a while! . . . Ready to upbraid Alfred, he opened the door and aimed a kick at Columbine. To his great astonishment, he encountered a blast of rage which was mightier than any he had ever planned to unleash himself. . . . Was it on this occasion or another that Driss packed his suitcase and took temporary leave of Alfred, exclaiming: *"Tu estas mas loco che yo, hombre, ti juro!"*? Another, I think. Let us suppose that after a couple of stormy hours they both succumbed to hunger and exhaustion. If Driss understood finally why Alfred had been furious to find himself locked up in his own house, he could never fathom why he had also been so frightened. And as the real basis of Alfred's fears was probably congenital, if not atavistic, Driss himself was often perplexed and sometimes downright scared by Alfred's conduct.

Late one night, when Alfred and I had already been living for some months in Tangier, I was sitting alone at the main café on the *socco grande*. Considering the hour, I was surprised to see Alfred's car pull up at the crowded café across the road. By the violent way he applied the brakes I understood that his arrival boded ill for someone. Like a prize fighter rushing out of his corner, Alfred hurled himself out of the car and stormed into the café. A few moments later, Driss emerged from the café with his head bent low, while Alfred followed, punching him repeatedly. "Don't do it here! Don't do it here! Wait till we get home!" Driss pleaded,

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hoping to avoid further humiliation in public. "But of course I had to do it there," Alfred explained to me the next day. "If I'd waited till we got home, he'd have started with his Rudolph Valentino voice: *'Alfredo, che tienes, mi amigo? . . . '*, and all my anger would have melted away like the snows on Mount Carmel." At this stage of their relationship Driss had developed, fortunately for Alfred, the kind of filial respect which prevented him from hitting back. Alfred expected him to develop punctuality too; Driss had promised to be home before midnight, Alfred had waited until after one before he had raided the café. No problems of this kind arose again during the following weeks, because Driss felt too ashamed to be seen out of doors.

One particular episode, however, illustrates better than any other the dangerous mechanism of Alfred's psyche. I had spent the afternoon with Bowles, who had recently completed the manuscript of *A Life Full Of Holes,* a story by Hamed Charhadi which he had taped, then translated from Maghrebi Arabic. We talked about the extent to which the grim and often sorrowful contents of Charhadi's story represented an accurate evocation of social conditions throughout Morocco, and we discussed the order of the last four chapters. Subsequently I asked Bowles about the business side of translation, the terms of the contract, royalties, etc., because I was planning myself to translate a novel from French, and I wanted to know what remuneration I might expect for such an enterprise. He offered me a methodical explanation, but as the subject was new to me and contained quite intricate details, I did not understand it well. To save him from having to repeat himself I suggested that we wait until I received a reply from the publisher to whom I had written about my project.

Returning to my hotel, I passed by Alfred's house. Calling to me from the narrow window aperture, in which his head appeared to have been framed expectantly for some time, he told me to come in for tea, which we had learned to drink as Moroccans do at all hours of the day and night. His mood was sour and disgruntled; he was brooding over something. As he

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too had read and praised the manuscript of *A Life Full Of Holes,* this was naturally a topic of conversation. Who was the first to mention the contract? I have forgotten. What I do remember clearly, however, is that when the subject was brought up, Alfred insisted on hearing everything. As I had understood little, and was concerned, moreover, with what the terms of my own contract might be rather than with what the terms of Bowles' were, I began what was bound to be a garbled if not erroneous account of the financial procedure. Before I had dealt with even a third of the clauses, Alfred sprang suddenly to his feet. He was transformed by rage. Big, burly, menacing, powerful, with every limb shaking for conflict, his face exceptionally pale, and his eyes screwed up and hidden in their sockets, he grabbed hold of a footstool and hurled it to the other end of the room.

"Come on!" he roared. "I'm going to get him!"

"But Alfred, what business is it of yours if . . . "

"Shut up! You don't know anything!" He had to raise his voice even higher, because in anticipation of a fight Columbine was rushing round in circles and barking furiously, while Skoura had crept into a corner where she whimpered over the broken footstool.

"Down, Columbine, down!" Alfred yelled. "Come on, you! Follow me! I've had enough of his shit! This time, I'm going to get him," he repeated murderously, as he rushed down the steps. Since he was quite possessed and deaf to reason, I didn't expostulate any further, but followed him reluctantly into the street. He charged ahead like an enraged bull, scaring away his neighbor's children. Arriving at Bowles' house, he banged upon the door. . . . The scene that followed wasn't enjoyable. I needn't describe it in detail here. Listening attentively to the abusive tirade which Alfred unleashed, I couldn't discern why *exactly* he was so furious with Bowles. Evidently, however, he had used the scraps of information about the contract as a pretext for a showdown which he had been hatching for a long time, perhaps ever since Bowles had failed to provide him with the blankets. To begin

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with, Bowles remained alert, calm and silent; eventually, he was provoked into ordering Alfred out of his house. Fortunately, Alfred didn't insist on staying, but he didn't leave without uttering a final threat.

"Don't think that this is the end of it, because it isn't! . . ." As Bowles didn't invite me to remain, I was obliged, once again, to follow Alfred into the street. He took a few staggering steps, then succumbed suddenly to remorse. What he said now was most revealing.

"What have I done?" he whined. "Oh, what have I done? . . . It's my father's fault. The anger and the rage. I get it all from him. My father. It isn't me. I suppose Paul knows it isn't me. Should I go back and tell him it isn't me? . . . No, not now, another day. But why did I do it? Oh, why did I do it? . . . My father's fault . . ."

I accompanied Alfred back to his house where he collapsed in the corner next to Skoura to whom he attempted to offer an explanation of what had just occurred. There was no need for me to delay my departure. The quarrel was soon mended following what Alfred termed The Stanley and Livingstone Principle: a small expatriate group of writers couldn't afford lasting dissension in its midst. With regard to Alfred's final threat, it proved to be a boomerang, for it was he, not Bowles, who had not heard "the end of it"; he grew more and more obsessed by the mysterious feud, and some months later it was to flare up once again.

Let me pause now and attempt to draw some tentative conclusions about Alfred's conduct. First of all, some general remarks are required about him and Bowles. Their ways of living were radically different, as were their scales of values; they sought and appreciated quite distinct activities and phenomena in life. Each was intensely individualistic, but in his own specific manner. Perhaps I can best illustrate this comparison by asking the reader to visualize the following quite imaginary scene. Bowles and Alfred are walking down a street together. The first is elegantly dressed and walks in a sprightly manner; the second is dressed in a slovenly fashion

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and shuffles along kicking stones. As they approach a puddle, they break off an interesting conversation about the origins of the Berbers. Bowles steps round the puddle carefully; he examines its shape and size, he measures the depth of the water, he notes the color of the mud. But Alfred has to jump right into the middle of the puddle and splash around in order to get the feel of it. Bowles gets soaked, which doesn't please him at all, while Alfred attempts to conceal his embarrassment by accusing Bowles, for instance, of being a coward. "A coward . . . " Bowles muses. "I suppose you mean that I'm prudent . . . " "No, I don't mean that at all," Alfred snarls. "I mean . . . " But there I leave them to their wrangling.

To pass now from the general to the particular. What I have so far related doesn't form the only evidence to indicate that Alfred was seeking, however subconsciously, a father figure, and that he decided, for one motive or another, that Bowles was suited for the rôle. Unfortunately he tended to require not a father figure who would protect him, but one whom he could attack and at the same time depend upon. Lest this sound like arbitrary and superficial Freudian theory, let me refer to two of Alfred's texts. A first draft of *Safari* was written in 1964; the published version appeared in *The American Review*. The narrator goes scorpion hunting with Gerald, who is clearly based on Bowles. Investing Gerald with supernatural powers, the narrator says: "Sometimes I think Gerald is God, at least a local god, or more exactly, a local demon." In the much longer and more explicitly autobiographical *The Foot* (as it appeared in *The American Review*), Bowles makes a briefer appearance, this time, in the guise of Peter Plate. To quote the narrator: "And I wrote a letter to Peter Plate begging him, my magic father, to promise he would give me Morocco again. Like my father, whom I hated, Peter gave me a life. Some life!" *The Foot* also includes an account of the death and burial of Larbi's father. Bowles and the texts aside, one of the most moving gestures which Alfred made in the context of this drama was to write a letter of

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reconciliation to his own dead father. This solved nothing, however, for Alfred expected to receive a reply.

I was with Alfred for one of the last days he spent in Asillah before moving into a modern flat in a quiet suburb of Tangier.

A festival day. An outdoor festival of Pagan-Berber rather than Islamic origin; this meant that non-Moslems were not discouraged from participating. Aided and anaesthetized by lots of *kief* and trance-creating music, wild, shaggy representatives from isolated hill tribes had performed outlandish routines which included drinking boiling water from the long thin spouts of hissing copper kettles and thrusting wicked knives and rusty nails into various parts of their anatomy. Duly taped by Paul Bowles, the visiting musicians had gone to refresh themselves at a *pinchito* and Coca-Cola stand, while the wailing women had returned home to rest before preparing the evening meal. Asillah's local modern youth, which had not looked with a favorable eye upon what they deemed tourist propaganda, now took over the dusty, trampled square. They linked their arms together and formed a bold circle. Then the dance began. Rhythmic and purposeful. One of the dancers sang out the refrain of a popular traditional song, but instead of following up with the usual verse, he substituted lines that sparked with revolutionary implications. Although they were subtle enough to be understood fully by only a limited number of the dancers, their spirit galvanized the whole circle. The dancers' steps grew faster and more frenzied, and echoed throughout the square like the sound of a stampede. Their powerful, swaying, glistening bodies were locked together in an embrace as strong as a wrestling hold. It seemed that none could break into that impregnable circle. But Alfred did. How he ever succeeded, I will never know, but suddenly he was there. Without any hesitation the dancers welcomed him joyfully into their midst. More than one cried out: *"Alfredo! . . . Alfredo! con nosotros! . . . "* He started dancing clumsily in the center of the circle, then he linked himself to the other dancers and whirled round with them for a while. Returning to the center of the circle he

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remained there, but this time his steps were expert and ecstatic. Buoyed up and delighted he felt himself part of a living community, if only for a moment.

Alfred's abode in Tangier provided him not only with comfort and modern conveniences, but also with more privacy and space than he had ever enjoyed in Asillah. Its outstanding feature was a terrace almost as big as a tennis court. For less than $100 a month Alfred started living in comparative luxury. He spent as much time as possible sunbathing on the terrace which offered him a quite magnificent view of arboreous and hilly, lush-green countryside. Lying back in a striped deck chair and smoking a few *sepsis* of *kief,* he would pretend sometimes that he was a film director. "Cut!" he exclaimed, if ever a cloud troubled his horizon. "Send it back to Paul Bowles!" At night, the view was transformed by mysterious lights, and the barking of stray dogs counterpointed the beating of hidden drums. At such moments, one could easily believe that Islam was only a veneer; the gods of more ancient civilizations would return.

Alfred didn't neglect his work, however. He found a solid enough table for his Underwood; he arranged his small collection of books on the shelves; placing Maimonides next to Herodotus, he classified and filed his manuscripts.

He enjoyed talking about literature. Speaking of his contemporaries, he tended to dismiss the majority of them as conventional entertainers. Wherever he spotted what he deemed arid professionalism, opportunism, pretension, cant and humbug, he was quick to denounce it. He cast his anathema on "the nameless hirsute multitude that believes that literature began with Ginsberg's *Howl.*" Referring to *Tropic of Cancer,* he chuckled: "In a world of aching size-queens who's going to be impressed by Mr. Miller and his mighty . . . six inches . . . " He ridiculed a fashionable American intellectual "who goes shopping for left-wing ideas in Paris with a Berlitz phrase book, drops half of them under the table when she dines in the *seizième arrondisement,* then

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sells the remainder for right-wing prices when she returns to New York." French writers could amuse him, too. "As long as their syntax is correct, they only have to fart in order to win the *Prix Goncourt.*"

Did he appreciate any contemporary fiction? Very little. I remember him being excited about one particular work which he reviewed: *Last Exit To Brooklyn* by Hubert Selby. Without any reservations he considered it a masterpiece. And despite his personal complications with Paul Bowles, he never failed to speak of his work with admiration and respect. "That elegant, sturdy, controlled prose, we really do need more of it," he would say, smacking his lips, as though he were lapping up cranberry sauce from his plate. About *The Sheltering Sky,* which he reread in Tangier, he advanced an original theory which I will mention because of the insight which it provides into Alfred's own complex nature. He claimed that the main characters, Port and Kit, were really one and the same, and that the main theme of the book was the survival of the feminine principle. He quoted as symbolically significant in this context the scene where Kit goes bathing in a moonlit pool shortly after Port's death.

There were several other writers to whom he referred when he spoke specifically about his own work. The critic whom he most admired was Edmund Wilson, from whom he had received, incidentally, a complimentary letter about his own essays. The one writer to whom he had ever written a letter of praise himself was Djuna Barnes, because of *Nightwood.* His personal attitude toward the craft of writing, at this time, is reflected by his paraphrase of a remark made by Isak Dinesen. "It doesn't matter how dead you feel, you have to do a little every morning, without faith, without hope and without charity." He quoted passages, too, from Scott Fitzgerald's last letters; he admired Fitzgerald because he didn't let the legend or the alcohol kill the artist, he went on writing right up to the end.

But it was about his early years in Paris that Alfred proved most loquacious: "I used to spend one week with Marlowe

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and the next with D.H. Lawrence. The sentence, that's what really mattered to me. A beautiful, balanced, carefully wrought and meaningful sentence. That was the secret! If I could learn to write true sentences, the music would follow of its own accord. . . . '' And there was Balzac too, because of the power, the energy and the effusion. And once a month a couple of Simenon novels, because he never forgot the importance of a good plot. '' 'The plot's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king!' I used to sing every morning over breakfast. Ah! the old days when *croissants* were made of butter and gold, and a cup of black coffee would keep me alert for hours. Now I need a handful of dexies every morning. . . . ''

Out of Alfred's rambling literary gossip one clear and important point did emerge. What was required today, he believed, and what he looked forward to, was a classical revival. But let me conclude this visit to Alfred's literary *salon* by evoking an unusual incident which occured there one winter evening.

I remember him struggling with the third version of an opening paragraph for an essay on Jean Genet. The difficulty, in this instance, was caused by Jean-Paul Sartre whose voluminous study *Saint Genet, Comedien et Martyr* Alfred had recently reread. Believing that he had something original and important to say himself, he was determined to express his ideas as accurately and as coherently as Satre had expressed his own. No easy task, indeed! He was interrupted by the sounds of subdued chanting. He discovered Driss stripped to the waist and swaying in a trance by the fireside. Darting up higher than usual, the flames crackled and were colored blue. Around the fireside stood an array of eggshells covered with magic formulae which had been written in fresh blood. Driss looked so imposing and majestic in the firelight that Alfred hardly dared approach him. He asked in a trembling voice: ''What are you doing? . . . the blood, is it yours or tomorrow's chicken's? . . . '' Driss replied only by muttering incantations in a dialect quite unknown to Alfred, who had to

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sit down and wait for the ceremony to conclude. Then Driss offered an explanation. He realized somehow that Alfred was having difficulty with his work and that a deadline day was approaching; he decided to help him with a spell. Moreover, the editor would double the usual fee, otherwise his fingernails would drop off one by one. Touched by Driss' considerate behavior, Alfred did indeed complete the essay. He told me that no addition was made to the cheque, though a few months later Alfred did receive an increase in salary for his monthly *Tribune* articles.

"It took a long time for my words to reach New York," Driss had explained.

"Nobody can live for long in this country without believing in magic," Alfred told me.

The number of well-known writers living in Tangier, at this time, was large enough to win the attention of *Esquire* magazine which duly commissioned a reporter and a photographer to "cover the scene." Everyone of note was mentioned, and posed in front of the camera, except Alfred Chester. The expatriate community had tacitly agreed to ostracize him; he was excluded from their midst on the day of the official line-up. Not only was Alfred's behavior considered too outrageous, he was also guilty of committing what La Rochefoucauld, in his *Maximes,* considered the unpardonable sin: he wounded other people's *amour-propre*.

I remember that during a short visit Cecil Beaton made to Tangier, an English resident of aristocratic lineage gave a select lunch party to which, through Paul Bowles' suggestion (if I am not mistaken), Alfred was invited. In this small gathering it seemed that Alfred felt neither intimidated, nor aggressive, nor competitive. He found the guests charming, gifted and unpretentious. He appreciated their polished and relaxed manners, he enjoyed the witty conversation, and he loved the taste of caviar. On the table stood an elegant crystal vase full of wonderfully fragrant red roses which had been plucked that morning from the splendid garden that sur-

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rounded and embellished the house. One of the guests moved the vase carefully toward Alfred, saying:

"They really do smell like heaven, don't you agree?" Alfred sniffed them, and pondered a while.

"They smell like . . . *piss*," he said. His words didn't ruffle the company; they simply caused a few moments of diplomatic silence. Fortunately, the lord of the manor was able to exorcise Alfred's mischievous demon.

"I think I follow your reasoning," he said benignly. "You find the odor of my roses so exquisite, in fact, that you don't wish to adulterate it with conventional words of praise. *Ah, mais vous autres écrivains, vous devez toujours nous mettre à l'épreuve, n'est-ce pas!* . . . "

At the other end of the social ladder Alfred maintained casual relations with "Hermann Hesse's little boys," as he dubbed them with a crooked smile—a group of sad, solemn young men from New York who had organized a little ghetto in the dank alleys of the Tangier medina; they lived in a huge old house which became known as Bat Palace. Their main reason for remaining in Morocco appeared to be the low price of *kief* and its everyday accessibility. (*Kief,* like marijuana, is a product of the hemp plant, but it isn't nearly as strong. On the whole, effects depend upon the smoker's individual metabolism.) They could talk with authority about the number of leaves found on an ideal stem of *cannibis sativa.* Unfortunately they also set themselves up as specialists in mysticism, literature and politics.

"They think they're revolutionaries," Alfred said, one afternoon, as we sat at a café in the populous *socco chico.* "They're just selfish, self-centered, lower middle-class kids. America doesn't breed revolutionaries. It's much too clever for that. But it does breed failures and escapees."

"I thought there were some serious Marxists in the States," I said.

"Don't make me laugh. Sometimes I think that I'm the only American revolutionary on the planet," Alfred said. "But what kind of revolutionary can I be, if I don't believe in

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any creed or belong to any party? Can you answer that?''

''Perhaps you're a demented disciple of Thoreau and Bakunin,'' I suggested.

''I don't know what that means exactly,'' he said after reflecting, ''and I suspect that you don't either. But at least it doesn't sound pedantic.''

Later, when Alfred came to suffer from loneliness and homesickness, he would visit the Bat Palace quite frequently and even receive some of its members at his own house in the residential suburb. But when he had a birthday, he announced it only to Driss and me. Invited to dinner, I brought him a plant which I thought suited his personality.

''And why do you think it's just like me?'' Alfred asked.

''Because the stalks are twisted, rough and thorny, but they protect the flowers, which are delicate and pink.''

''I accept the gift,'' Alfred said.

Alfred preferred the real citizens of Tangier. He remained on friendly terms with his Spanish *concierge,* a quite extraordinarily fat lady with a perfectly round face and big, bulging dark eyes. The two would exchange local gossip over a carafe of red wine. With tradesmen, with the owners of little shops, with waiters and bartenders Alfred could spend hours gabbing in broken Spanish, and joking. He had regular visits from a few Moroccan high school students; he discussed theology and philosophy with the older ones, confiding to me that they knew so much more than he did; he helped the younger ones with their English lessons. When one of Driss' relatives fell ill, Alfred didn't hesitate to visit him and contribute funds toward the purchase of medicines.

I didn't succeed as well as Alfred in making a life for myself in Tangier. I decided to leave Morocco for a while. I went to Sicily where a member of the Salaparuta family kindly put at my disposal a small, abandoned eighteenth century tower in a village near Palermo. Here I was able to insulate myself and work undisturbed for a few months. During this time (it must have been the summer of 1964) Alfred and I wrote to each other regularly. From his third or fourth letter I realized

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he was feeling much less settled than he had been. He was smoking excessive amounts of *kief* and had also taken a few doses of LSD. He seemed to grow more fearful, more easily intimidated, and more prone to panic. He had been shown a letter by one of the Bat Palace crowd. In it Paul Bowles mentioned having Alfred and me "bumped off." Alfred wrote to me in great alarm, enclosing a Xerox copy of the letter, and urging me to sign a sort of anti-Bowles petition. I wrote him that surely Bowles had written the letter in a moment of exasperation and that its threat was not to be taken seriously. After all, a year had passed since it had been written: Alfred and I were still alive. Moreover, a real assassin never announces his plans in writing. Etcetera. But Alfred wasn't convinced; he suspected that I was in league with Bowles, and some weeks passed before he wrote to me again.

The next dramatic item I heard was that he had removed his wig. I was surprised to learn how acutely nervous he felt in Tangier when he finally mustered enough courage to go out of doors without it. Today, however, having read *The Foot,* I can understand that Alfred had been too deeply marked, if not traumatized, ever since he had first put on the wig when he was fourteen, to be rational about the experience. In *The Foot* he wrote:

> I sat and accepted the wig. It was like having an axe driven straight down the middle of my body. Beginning at the head. Whack! Hacked in two with one blow like a dry little tree. Like a sad little New York tree.
>
> I wore it to school only. Every morning my mother put it on for me in front of the mirror in the kitchen and combed it and puffed it and fluffed it and pasted it down. Then, before going out of the house, I would jam a hat on top of it, a brown fedora, and flatten the wig into a kind of matting. I hated it and was ashamed of it, and it made me feel guilty.

But finally getting rid of it turned out not to be as bad as he thought it would be. Even members of the expatriate colony who disliked Alfred wouldn't ridicule him for being bald.

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At this time Alfred wrote that he was starting work on a new novel. His letter read: "I get up early while my breath's beloved is still asleep. I'm still sleeping, too, in my way. I stagger into the next room and collapse at the typewriter. I don't look at it, I just gaze into space. I've no idea about what's going to happen. I've no ideas at all. I'm blank. Then it starts in farts and dribbles. Blurp bloop bleep, I'm writing a novel. . . . " Such was the genesis of *Exquisite Corpse.* Not long after, I put aside my books and notes, boarded the *Leonardo Da Vinci* at the port of Palermo, and returned to the country that I loved.

Alfred greeted me shyly, because the wig had gone. I hastened to assure him that his appearance had improved. Indeed, he looked more virile, more serious, and distinguished. To celebrate my return, he treated me to what he called A Day In The Country With Alfred Chester. Driving to an unfrequented spot at the far end of the main beach, we got out of the car and walked along the sands until we approached scattered pastures where sheep were grazing.

"Let's sit down," said Alfred. "I have to sing a few songs now." His repertoire was limited but unusual. It began with: "America! America! Land of the brave and the free . . . . " This was followed by a French ditty:

Valencia! Valencia!
Si tu avances quand je recule,
Comment veux-tu que je t'encule?

I went out onto the terrace in order to watch the sun set. Alfred came up behind me stealthily.

"Once upon a time," he whispered ominously, "there was a little girl who would never look at the setting sun, because that was the hour when God painted the sky with the blood of all the soldiers slain in battle." I could not help but shudder at these words.

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I had few clues as to the reason for these odd permutations except that he was obsessed with his work. During the following weeks Alfred visited me occasionally at my small hotel on the *Calle Portugal*. Although he would arrive by car, he would step breathlessly into my room, as though he had been running. He talked in an excitable and often incoherent manner about his novel, and about nothing else. He tended to identify himself with his heroine Mary Por-Por, while he referred to other characters as though they were plotting against him. Although he had often spoken to me enthusiastically and in detail about his work, especially about *Behold Goliath*, he had never bragged or raved as he did now.

When it was my turn, in the evenings, to visit Alfred, I discovered him lying on his bed, exhausted but garrulous; he tended to dramatize the most trivial incidents and point to the supposedly occult significance of the most casual remarks. He offered confused feelings about suffering and joy, guilt and retribution. At times, his speech skirted the border of delerium; at other times, he fell silent. It occurred to me that he would probably feel better and function more efficiently if he stopped smoking *kief* for a while, and lived chastely, too. I put forward theories about his metabolism. I lectured him about his thyroid gland, his endocrine glands and his suprarenal glands.

"Regulate their secretions and you'll be able to change yourself," I said. I talked about the influence of the testicles upon the strength and quality of the mind, and about the relation between sexual excesses and consciousness. And I concluded, somewhat sententiously, no doubt:

" *'Tous les sentiments puisent leur absolu dans la misère des glandes.'* " But all to no avail.

"So you want to know more about my wee little glands, do you? Just you wait till I tell Driss about that. He'll be after you with a meatchopper. You've been studying Biology in your Sicilian castle, that's what you've been doing. Well, I'll have you know that Maimonides counsels me just to remain upon my bed and commune with my own heart. . . . "

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I spent only a few weeks in Tangier, then I set out on a journey to the south of Morocco. Visiting Paul Bowles before my departure, I was received hospitably; he provided me with maps, advice and information for my travels. We joked about the notorious letter.

Some months later, finding myself unexpectedly low in funds, I was obliged to go to London in order to earn money. When I boarded a ship at Casablanca, Alfred and I had already met for the last time on Moroccan soil.

Less than a year passed, however, before Alfred arrived, one summer, to stay with me in a drab basement flat which I rented in a small street off the Earl's Court Road. My life was dismal at that time; I survived by writing reports on manuscripts and foreign novels for various publishers. Alfred arrived with the manuscript of *Exquisite Corpse* under one arm and Driss on the other.

"A hiding place is just what I need," he said, stepping into the subterranean room. He had come to London for three specific reasons: to visit his publisher, to consult a doctor about Driss' foot, and to have his own teeth attended to on the National Health Service. No one in Morocco had been able to cure an infection in Driss' foot. Difficulties arose immediately. Perhaps of all Moroccans, those who come from Asillah remain the most attached to their home town; even when they travel within Morocco itself they soon grow homesick. Driss felt ill at ease and disoriented; he would rarely leave the flat except for a short walk after dinner. One taste of the native cooking induced him to go on a hunger strike. When I suggested canned food as an alternative, he replied that he would prefer to eat his shoes. Alfred spent a couple of days investigating stores and shops until he found the appropriate ingredients for making genuine home-made *tajim* and *cous-cous*. Although I knew a doctor who could receive Driss in private consulting rooms, Driss refused to go unless the doctor swore that he wouldn't measure any part of his anatomy. He had once seen visiting ethnologists, who he ap-

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parently equated with doctors, measuring the heads of young men in Asillah; he believed that when the ethnologists returned to their own countries they used the measurements in order to exercise power over their owners' souls.

"And get those books off the shelf!" Alfred instructed me, pointing to the works of Lévi-Strauss. "You never know, just the sight of them may disturb him."

In these circumstances Alfred himself grew increasingly nervous and irritable. Only in the evenings would he relax, and play a game of cards with Driss. Then, donning a white silk Moroccan nightgown and balancing a lighted candle on top of his shining bald head, he danced a jig and sang:

"Three little Bedouin souls are we,
Far from home and over the sea.
When we get back to our tents and tea,
We'll live again most joyfully."

One evening Alfred showed me *Exquisite Corpse*. He thought it was a masterpiece, and that it would make him rich and famous. He handed me the manuscript and asked me to read it. He stretched himself out on the dilapidated sofa, while I sat down at the writing table. I had nearly all of Alfred's published fiction and a number of his critical articles. I considered him an authentic, versatile, and—in the best sense of the word—sophisticated author. But my reading of *Exquisite Corpse* only served to confirm the misgivings that I had started entertaining in Sicily when Alfred first wrote me about it. The novel lacked a structural backbone, chapters were strung together, too many threads were loose: Situations were not described in detail, characters did not appear in depth; the effect was not impressionistic, but merely sketchy. Sentences tended to be short and lame, they sounded too discordant, too staccato, and imagery was often strained. Rarely did the humor exceed the level of night club entertainment. The general tone was often marred by self-pity.

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"Well, it gives me a rather uneasy feeling . . . " I said. "As though it's been written not by you, the writer, but by one of the characters inside the book. . . . " I paused and looked at Alfred. He was still staring out of the window, but he nodded his head, slowly, encouraging me to continue.

"If you'd been trying to do something *à la* Pirandello," I went on, "you might have. . . . Look, let's take a concrete example. There are two chapters, aren't there, written as a letter to a psychoanalyst. But there's absolutely no change in style. The result is . . . "

"Get out," Alfred interrupted me. He leapt to his feet. Swelling with rage, he pointed at me. A strange thought glided through my consciousness: Moses denouncing the idolators of the golden calf must have looked like this.

"Get out of the house! Get out of the house this very instant!" he roared. As I was prepared to defend my rights (my one room basement flat!), Driss suddenly intervened.

"Both of you are completely crazy!" he shouted in Spanish. "People don't fight about words written on pieces of paper," he continued, not unsurprisingly, since as a conditioned Moslem he held all books except the *Koran* full of rubbish and swarming with lies.

"Anyhow, neither of you can know what this is worth," he concluded, pointing to the manuscript of *Exquisite Corpse*, "until the factories start selling it." He believed that books were printed in dark little rooms at the back of bookshops.

His attempt at reconciliation failed to appease Alfred, however. "I just don't want to see him again until tomorrow," he said emphatically.

Driss and I went into the tiny kitchen and held counsel.

"He's crazier than you," Driss said. "So why don't you just go away until he calms down. He always calms down after a few hours, you know."

"In this part of the world we say: An Englishman's home is his castle," I said.

"Then be careful about whom you invite into it. I swear to you on both my parents' heads that I won't let him steal any-

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thing from your home. Here, I'll even give you some English money for the cinema."

Taking the ten shilling note which Driss offered me I abandoned my castle without further ado; but I could feel resentment growing like a bruise. Not even the prospect of seeing Buster Keaton in *The Navigator* at a nearby cinema would soothe it. Ignoring the nearby cinema I walked on until I reached a bookshop. Entering it, I approached a shelf devoted to the Classics; I had often thought that ancient Greece might prove to be my spiritual homeland. Aeschylus . . . Aristophenes . . . Aristotle . . . Demosthenes . . . Diogenes . . . Euripedes . . . Heraclitus . . . Herodotus . . . Hesiod . . . The very names were balm! Seeking a work which would epitomize an essential part of the Greek experience, I glanced at the adjoining shelf. There I spotted the *Metamorphoses* by Ovid, and intuition gently guided my hand toward it. Leaving the bookshop, I made my way to Hyde Park where I sat down in the shade of a valiant oak. Opening the book haphazardly, I came to a passage where we learn that the laws of hospitality are sacred to Zeus. All my resentment returned. It shot up violently to form a bitter grudge. I put the *Metamorphoses* aside. I could do nothing but brood upon Alfred's conduct. "May *Zeus* pardon him," I cried, "I don't!"

Several months passed before Alfred and I met again. He returned to Morocco; a few letters passed between us. His life grew more and more unstable. He and Driss quarrelled and separated while they were driving south through Spain. Driss went to Holland where he took a job in a factory. Columbine and Skoura came to an unpleasant fate. *Exquisite Corpse* was duly published; it won its author no acclaim. Meanwhile I had moved to more congenial rooms in South Kensington.

One day, I received a letter from Alfred with a London postmark. He asked me to meet him the next evening at his hotel. "It's very important," he concluded. My curiosity overcame whatever grudge I bore him. He had taken a room

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on the twentieth floor in one of London's few skyscrapers. It was large, well furnished, and had a private bathroom. If Alfred had problems, they were apparently not financial. He received me in a mysteriously gentle and knowing manner, as though we were both members of the same conspiracy. I sat down on the quilt-covered bed where a newly purchased edition of Blake's *Selected Works* was open at the *Songs of Experience*. Asking me a few questions about my own life, Alfred listened attentively to my replies. I had the impression, however, that he was merely being polite: this was quite unprecedented. More purposefully, he showed me two recent photographs, one of his mother, the other of himself. She looked somewhat self-righteous, but not unpleasant. He appeared in profile, looking boldly upward; his baldness seemed to crown his head.

"Your features are quite noble here," I said.

"Perhaps you underestimated me," he suggested. "But we don't have to talk about that. I want you to listen to me very carefully," he went on, sitting down next to me. He spoke slowly, deliberately, pausing between each phrase, as though he were struggling to control himself.

"They're following me. They followed me through Morocco and Spain. They came to New York too. They didn't like it very much there, I don't blame them. But they didn't go away. Well, a few of them did, but not the leaders . . . damn them! Anyhow they all caught up with each other again in Paris. They liked Paris, they had such a ball there, in fact, that they missed the plane for London. I almost enjoyed the flight. Of course, they arrived the next day. They must have taken the hovercraft, because they were a bit groggy and their color had changed. And now. . . . I want you to help me get rid of them, otherwise they're really going to get me this time. You're the only person who can do it."

"Who exactly are they?" I asked.

"We don't have to play games any longer," he replied wearily. "You know very well who they are. I suspect that you're working for them, too," he added, pointing to the

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Songs of Experience, as though they contained proof of his suspicions. "But it isn't your fault," he went on. "Many of their agents are not *voluntary* agents. Will you help me?" he asked quietly.

"Even if I do know who they are, you have to tell me in your own words."

"The little green people."

"Of course, I've seen them. They have thick scaley skin and flaming red eyes. Nasty looking creatures with a garish yellow light around them."

"No," Alfred said emphatically. "You're talking about the salamanders you see if you've been smoking too much grass. They're harmless. *My* little green people aren't hallucinations, they're a whole army, an army of . . . *gangsters*, and . . . " his voice rose "they keep on marching left right left right left right. . . . Listen!" He moved toward the window. "They're at work again. Listen! . . . " I could hear nothing but the muffled roar of London's heavy traffic twenty floors below.

"They're cutting the exhaust pipes off the cars and they're making the drivers go round and round the building," Alfred informed me from the window. "They're planning to drive me insane with the noise. But they're not going to get me that easily, oh no! . . . " He walked swiftly to the phone.

"Hello . . . switchboard . . . I want to speak to the manager at once. . . . Away until tomorrow? . . . Then you'll have to do something about it yourself. . . . " Whereupon, in a calm, precise manner, Alfred began to explain about the traffic below.

I left at the first opportunity. At the nearest phone booth I contacted Alfred's publisher. Interrupting my account of what had just happened, she told me she had heard all about the little green people. What was to be done? Left alone, Alfred might provoke the hotel manager into calling the police, and sooner or later he would end up in a straightjacket. Alfred's publisher agreed about the danger and she assured me she would take appropriate steps to help him. She

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said she would keep me informed. Subsequently I learned that Alfred was staying with friends in the country. A week later he was elsewhere. The country friends had been willing enough to look after Alfred, but they had not been able to cope with the little green people. Finally, Alfred agreed to stay at Ronald Laing's clinic in the East End of London. He had settled down there quite comfortably and was apparently hoping that I would visit him.

A former director of an excellent clinic in the west end, Ronald Laing was known chiefly, at that time, for his original and compassionate study of schizophrenia, *The Divided Self.* Following a disagreement with his colleagues, however, he founded his own clinic where, I believe, he advocated, in certain circumstances, the therapeutic use of LSD.

The day I visited Alfred, I got off the subway at the wrong stop and walked through some of the drabbest and dreariest streets of the east end. It had not changed significantly since Blake had sung with pity and indignation of the misery of such areas of London. The clinic itself was a mournful sight, like many buildings which had been repaired hastily after the London blitz. The interior was cold and bare; here and there, rags or wooden boards replaced window panes.

Quite untroubled by his surroundings, apparently, Alfred was sitting alone in the middle of a large, empty hall. Greeting me, he pointed to a cumbersome, old-fashioned phonograph at his side.

"You can't wind it up," he said. He made no mention of the little green people; he was unusually taciturn, but he kept on looking at me as though he were struggling to see me.

"Let's take a walk," I suggested.

"A little walk," Alfred agreed. He stood up slowly, tested his legs, then took me on a guided tour of the clinic. Perhaps he had taken sedatives, for he moved in slow motion, shuffling along and hardly speaking. As we passed a room without a door he pointed inside and said, "This is Peter, he does weaving." The young man turned round from his loom and grinned sheepishly.

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"How are you today, Peter?" Alfred asked.

"I'm all right today, Alfred," Peter replied. We made a few more visits; to David, who was a cobbler; Richard, who was a carpenter; Thomas, who played Snakes and Ladders. Shy, haunted individuals, they were draped in a heavy, almost tactile silence, and they applied themselves to their activities in a methodically obsessive manner.

"This is Mary," Alfred said, pointing to a slim young girl with pale lips and a fixed, hostile stare. "We won't say hello to her. She took some of my milk this morning, so I threw a bowl of porridge at her." He smiled for the first time since my arrival. "You have to go now," he went on, "it's time for me to wash. Driss may be arriving this evening."

"Whether you're crazy or not, I really don't know, Alfred, but you're certainly human," I said, and I put my arm around him affectionately. But then I experienced grief, for he did not respond at all except by an utter *lack* of response. I had the uncanny impression that I was touching something stony and at the same time horribly soft.

One morning, a few days later, Alfred visited me unexpectedly. Sitting down in a dilapidated armchair, he looked around the room.

"You always inhabit the same kind of room, whether it's in the basement or on the top. The wallpaper looks like a worn-out shroud, doesn't it . . . " He paused reflectively. "They want to interview me on the radio," he went on. "This afternoon at two. About literature, or something like that. Will you go instead of me?" he asked me.

"They wouldn't permit it," I said. I guessed that they wanted to talk to him about *Exquisite Corpse*.

"We could cut off all your hair and change your nose," Alfred said. "Or let me buy you a cigarette holder and a tape recorder, so you could go along and tell them you were Paul Bowles. I'm sure they'd much rather interview *him*."

"That isn't very funny. Anyhow, it wouldn't work."

"I'm horribly depressed," Alfred sighed, pushing himself further back into the armchair.

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"I could come along with you, if that's any help," I suggested.

"We can try," he agreed.

We arrived early at Broadcasting House and sat down on the main steps.

"He'll come out soon," Alfred said.

"Who will?"

"The interviewer. We're supposed to have a drink first. I don't have anything to say about literature. I really don't," he confided nervously.

"Just improvise."

"I could tell him about what's happened to me . . . but no, he wouldn't understand. I met him a long time ago in Rome; he used to write novels. Should I tell you what's happened?" he asked.

"If you wish."

"Nobody's real for me any longer. Nobody even exists." He raised his voice and added definitively: "Absolutely nobody exists unless I invent them. Now you know why I'm terrified."

"But you're a writer, so go ahead and invent people. Start another novel. Invent and sing, as you did in *Jamie.*"

"If you only knew . . . " Alfred sighed. A jovial slap on the back prevented him from continuing. Behind us towered the interviewer. He was tall and very broad-shouldered; he might have been an athlete.

"Enjoying one of our rare sunny days, eh!" he exclaimed. "Now, there's an excellent little pub just across the road. . . . "

He led us to the pub which was hot, noisy and crowded. Alfred made his way toward a corner.

"We'll sit here," he said. Conversation proved difficult. The interviewer's suave, self-assured manners barely concealed an arrogant, bossy core.

When it was time for Alfred to enter Broadcasting House, he insisted that I accompany him. At the door of the studio, the interviewer asked me to wait in the corridor.

"If he can't stay with me, I'm not going into that hole,"

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Alfred protested.

"But it's against regulations," the interviewer explained. Alfred took hold of my arm.

"Let's get out of this dump," he said.

"All right . . . all right," the interviewer conceded. Alfred asked me to sit at his feet and hold his hand. The interviewer frowned but raised no further objections.

"Do you think the microphone's alive?" Alfred asked me.

"You could always ask it," I replied. I was beginning to find his behavior contagious.

"Hush!" the interviewer pleaded. The questions were standard ones. Alfred's replies were short but safe; he spoke as though he were being prompted. The dialogue opened, more or less, as follows:

"Does Norman Mailer represent American youth?"

"No, he doesn't."

"Do many Negroes read James Baldwin?"

"No, they don't."

"Could Mary McCarthy be considered a fair representative of intellectual liberalism?"

"Indeed, she could." Fortunately, it didn't last for long. Every now and then, Alfred bent down and whispered to me: "How can he be so dumb? . . . . " Afterwards we all shook hands politely.

"I wonder what that was all about," Alfred muttered, as we hurried down the steps of Broadcasting House. "I have to get a cab back to the clinic. Thank you for coming," he said. "Wrap up warm, baby, the years are getting colder."

Only a few more months passed before I was able to leave London for Paris in order to collaborate on a film scenario. Taking an attic room on the top floor of a small hotel on the *rue Casimir Delavigne,* one of the few quiet streets in the *quartier latin,* I enjoyed a view of sloping slated roofs dotted with tiny orange-colored chimney stacks.

One autumn afternoon (it may have been in 1967), the telephone in the corridor buzzed nine times; this meant that there was either a call or a visitor for me.

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"Y a un monsieur en bas qui voudrait vous voir," the receptionist specified. *"Il me donne pas son nom, il veut pas vous parler au téléphone, non plus, mais il insiste de vous voir. Il est maron, hein! Ça doit être un américain,"* she deduced. I guessed it was Alfred. But when I opened the door, I thought, at first, that I had guessed amiss. My visitor wore a pale grey fedora, a conservative dark brown overcoat, a pale blue silk tie, and a new pair of pointed black leather shoes. I only knew that this prosperous, respectable and harmonious looking Saville-Row individual was Alfred Chester when he spoke.

"Stop staring at me!" He looked past me. "Just as I thought, the same kind of room. I climbed all those stairs just to examine your surroundings. I'm beginning to get a clue as to who you really are. We'll go and have a drink at the *Rhumerie* now, then we have to go somewhere special together."

As we crossed the *boulevard Saint Germain*, I noticed that Alfred was in good health; he had gained weight and looked stronger. He seemed much more responsive to the outside world than he had ever been in London; still his manner could be mysterious and secretive. At the terrace of the *Rhumerie* we sat for a while in silence, just two more sad ghosts in *Saint Germain des Pres,* until Alfred suddenly consulted his watch, which, like his clothes, was expensive and new.

"It's time for us to go there now," he announced.

"Where?" I asked him.

"Follow me," he whispered.

It was a long walk. Hunching up his shoulders and scurrying along, Alfred seemed to ignore the outside world. Bumping into a passer-by, he didn't bother to excuse himself. He wouldn't even stop to enjoy the open air market on the *rue de Buci,* even though it reminded me of a Moroccan *souk.* We turned right on the *quai* and followed the Seine until we reached the *pont de Sully.* Crossing it, we entered the fourth *arrondissement* at the *rue du-Petit-Musc.* We were now in the

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ancient and secluded neighborhood of the *Marais*. Following Alfred through a maze of small, narrow streets, I guessed suddenly where he was going. He had stopped to ask information of a very old man whose face was engraved with wrinkles and whose sideburns were long, thin and silvery. He wore a yarmulke and a stained, old-fashioned black overcoat. It was Friday evening, I recalled.

"It's on the next street," Alfred said to me. Squat and sepulchral, topped with humplike domes, the concrete synagogue could not be recommended for its architecture in this neighborhood of historical monuments.

"No," I said, as Alfred walked toward the door.

"Come," he said, taking hold of my hand, "or one of these days it will be too late for you."

"I'm not going into that place," I said resolutely.

"But we have to," Alfred insisted quietly.

"You are not my keeper, you are not the master of my conscience," I said. I added, "If I ever feel the need to pray it won't be in an official institute of worship."

"Now I know who you really are," Alfred said, letting go of my hand. "The Devil is an apostate." "But the Devil is not necessarily the enemy," I said heatedly. He entered the synagogue alone. He went in as though it were the tomb, I thought. A light rain started falling. Alfred must have stayed within the synagogue for nearly half an hour. When he came out, his head was bowed low; he approached me and said in a flat tone of voice:

"I'm now going to say good-bye to you. We have met for the last time." I watched him walk up the street; he soon disappeared among the crowds in the Jewish quarter.

And it was so. We neither saw nor wrote to each other again. During the next two years I heard occasional news about him from mutual friends. He had received a substantial sum of money; he moved between Morocco, where he rented a delightful house with an Eden-like garden in a popular suburb of Tangier; and Paris, where I heard he had purchased

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real estate; and New York, where he wrote *The Foot*, and avoided virtually everyone he knew; and Jerusalem, where he frequented gentle Moslem youths. He could not settle anywhere for long and he kept on drinking more and more heavily until he was consuming over a quart of vodka a day. He was also taking a variety of pills and smoking *kief* and hashish. Perhaps he was pursued by the Furies or the little green people beating Moroccan drums. Perhaps he was disappointed with *The Foot* and unable to continue writing. Incarcerated in his solitude, perhaps he succumbed to unbearable grief. At all events, on a second visit to Jerusalem, Alfred Chester died.

I was in Athens at the time. The Colonels had cast a pall over the ancient city. One evening, in a bar, my drinking partner, an American member of the expatriate community, told me that a radio news bulletin had made brief mention of the death of a young American writer in a hotel in Jerusalem.

"Chester was the name," he added.

"How did he die?" I asked calmly.

"Turns out he took an overdose of heroin."

"He never used hard drugs, he disapproved of them," I said. "If he took heroin, he must have done so deliberately. Suicide. But you're sure about the name?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, quite sure. Chester. Quite sure. Alfred Chester. A Brooklyn boy, wasn't he?"

"I guess he was." I said.

"Were you good friends?" my drinking partner asked me. Without bothering to reply, I left the bar. I wandered through the streets for a while, feeling numb. I bought a bottle of *ouzo* and drank half of it immediately. I wanted to be completely alone, but not in my hotel room. I walked in the direction of the white marble sports stadium; set in a hillside below the *Pangrati* neighborhood, it is sentinelled by fragrant pine trees. As soon as I was alone inside the deserted stadium I finished the bottle of *ouzo*. The moon was full, as it had been on the night when Alfred and I first met in Asillah. I made my way clumsily up an aisle toward the top of the stadium. I clambered higher up into the wooded hills. Stum-

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bling over a stone, I fell onto a carpet of pine needles. To my surprise, I discovered that I was too drunk to get up again. My muscles wouldn't obey my will. But how good the earth felt! How warm, soft and hospitable! I prepared to stay there forever. I remembered the opening of Alfred's best novel, *Jamie Is My Heart's Desire*. The undertaker is saying: "I have always felt more at ease among the dead . . . " Alfred is only where he always longed to be, I thought. There is no need for me to mourn him . . .

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Portfolio

Landscape / Loftscape

Marcia Resnick

"Landscape/Loftscape," a section of which follows, consists of pairs of deceptively similar photographs. The top photographs represent scenes taken from Marcia Resnick's travels, while the others are cleverly fashioned twins that she contrived from miscellaneous materials in her New York loft. These imitations served, at that time, to recreate a sense of exotica that was wanting in a New York winter. The miniature artificial paradises also serve as a whimsical means of emphasizing the highly tenuous nature of photographed "reality," an area of inquiry that no one has addressed quite so mischievously, or perhaps as convincingly, as Marcia Resnick.

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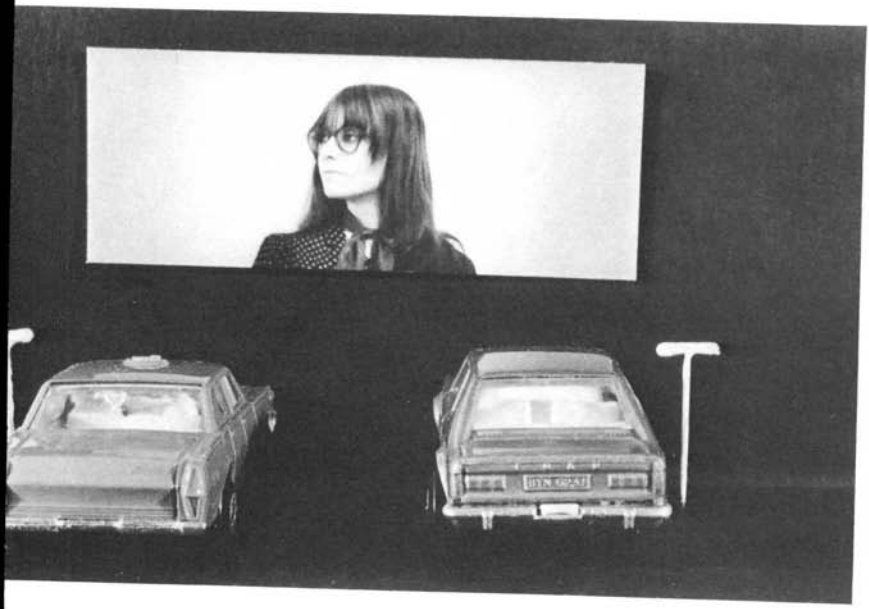

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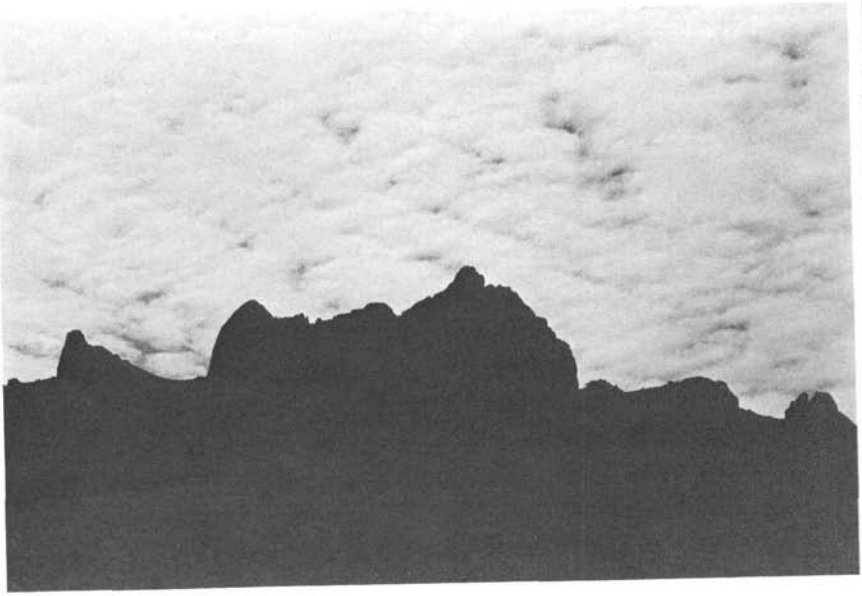

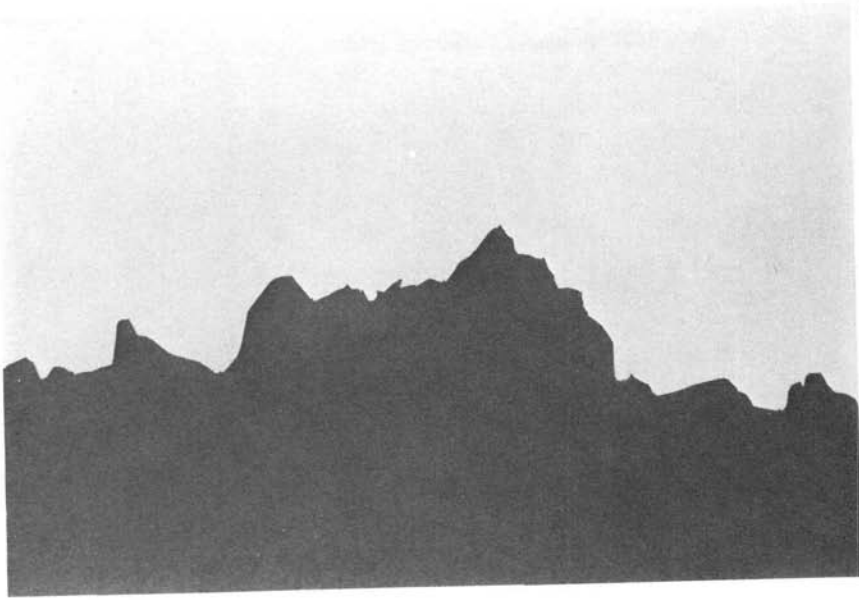

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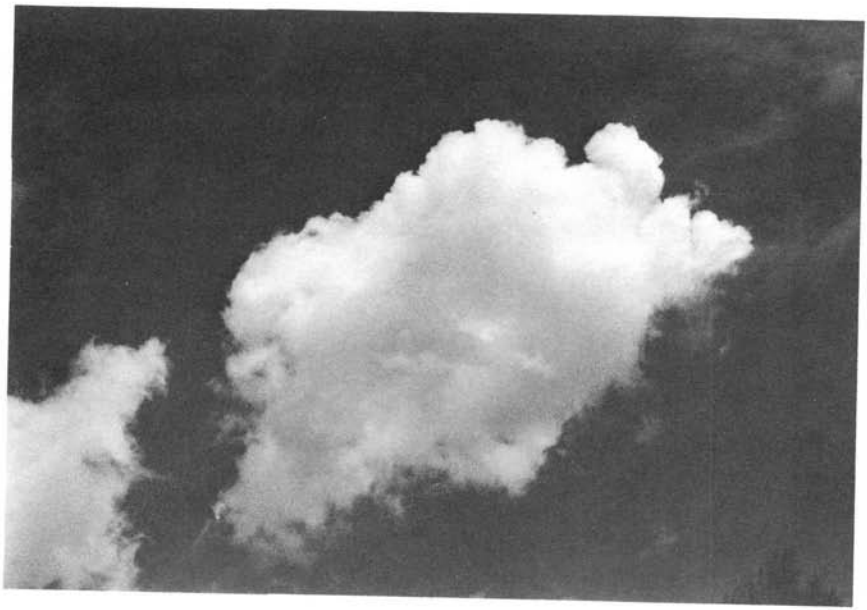

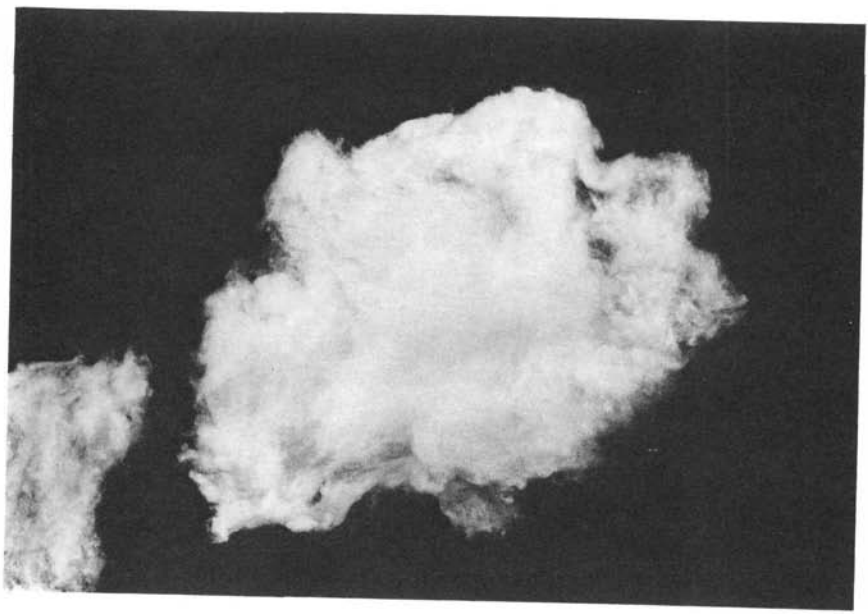

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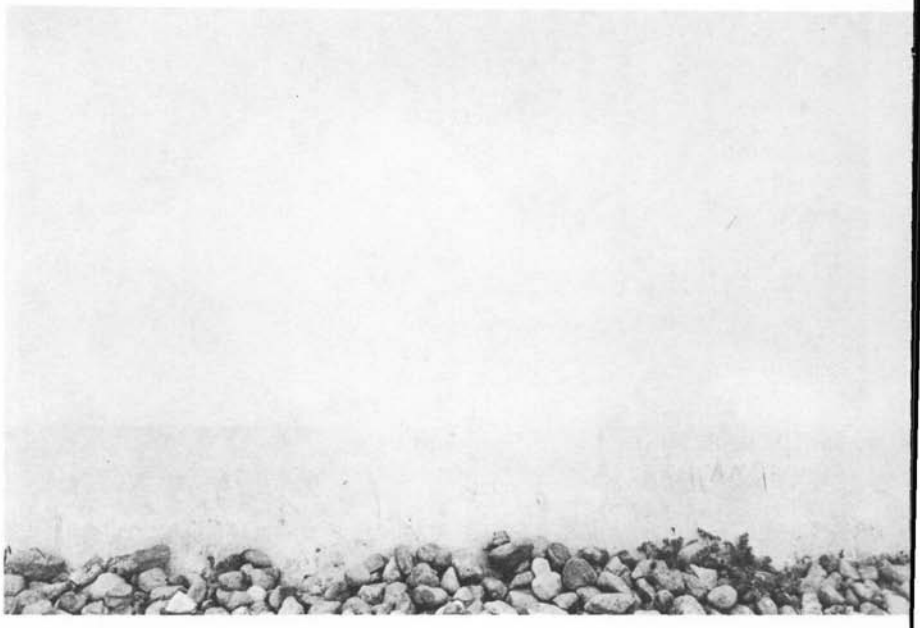

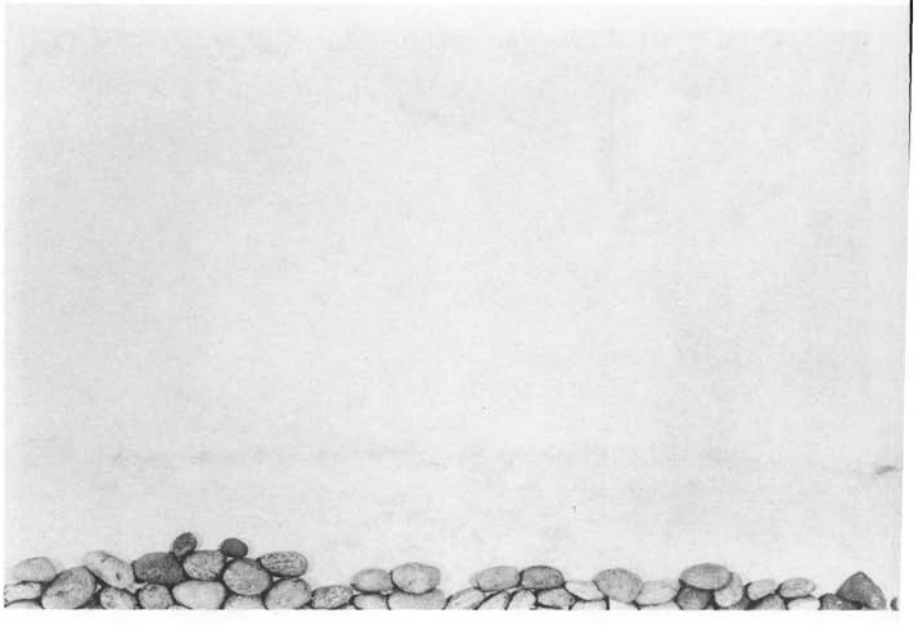

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Ina Chadwick Wilde

The World Traveler

Here are the snapshots from Horor Vacui

That's me jumping off a cliff!
That's me throwing a lit match in a forest of drought!
That's me standing in the rain with a lightning rod!

Of course, all of these are doubly exposed.

Oh, Look, Here I am; trying to take a steak from a Doberman.
Oh, Look, Here's a cute one; me taking a poke with boxing gloves at the local heavyweight.

I'm alive and well in Horor Vacui.
I have no time for visitors.
There is always a flurry of excitement.

Sometimes,

it is so quiet, I can hear

my vertebrae connecting.

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Billy Collins

Instructions to the Artist

I wish my head to appear perfectly round
and since the canvas should be of epic dimensions,
please trace the circle with a frisbee,
rather than a button or a dime.

My face should be painted with
an ant-like sense of detail;
pretend you are constructing a street
map of Rome and that the citizens
can lift 30 times their own weight.

The result should be a strained
but self-satisfied expression,
as if I am lifting a Volkswagon with one foot.

The body is not great matter,
just draw some straight lines
with a pencil and ruler, employing
Mr. Pretzel as a model but remember
to erase the salt flecks before the unveiling.

The background I leave up to you
but if there is to be a house
lines of smoke rising from the chimney
should be mandatory.
Never be ashamed of kindergarten—
it is the alphabet's only temple.

Also have several kangaroos grazing
and hopping around,
an allusion to my world travels.

Some final recommendations:
I should like to appear hatless.
Sign the painting on my upper lip
so my mustache will have a name.
In no part of the painting
should there appear stink lines.

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Michael Benedikt

The Badminton at Great Barrington

You never get to play it, the rackets
Are always missing or else the net's dissolved
During the winter, and there are mole holes
Where they shouldn't be, wherever that is.
Still, it's a *promise* every year, when you see Winter
Dumping its useless, silver mischief on your kerchief.
And the indifferences which have wrecked your life—
Whole aisles of carelessly abandoning boyfriends, lovers
turned oddly awful or litiginous, even close girlfriend
betrayal
Escalate like some tremendous terrible temple, turned
upside down
O, that sunny redemption
Of the difficulty of dirty days!
Then the Badminton of Great Barrington stands
Like the little sad statue of Christ suffering in the projected
"untasteful" neon pain on your lawn
Never used to.

—*A promise*, but of what? You told me you *really*
wondered,
Briefly, when you locked up the little summer cottage
Last September, threw the rackets at your sister
And left the rain-wet net in the corner of the closet.
The moles you thought you had dispatched
By deadly shredding in half with your broken power-mower,
At least that was something, you speculated,
Some achievement. And you left to beat the traffic
Rush, the crush that always comes whenever there
Is something to do and you'd rather be elsewhere.

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That was the autumn you met me, and promised
That all your winter moods, and every tragedy
Would be resolved, sportingly, in the spring
On the redeeming, receding green at Great Barrington,
that Eden. There
You would cut a fine figure, in your gingham Levis
Your recently-deceased mother kept locked a hatbox
Except for special occasions; in your rattan hat
With the ribbons she never let you wear
—You might sit on them, by accident.

When we got there, by accident, the moles were back
And the equipment was missing or else turned to mush.
I grew disappointed in the badminton at Great Barrington
That funny time, I grew gloomy, it was the beginning
Of the end for us, although perhaps someone else much wiser
Might date it back, when ready, to much more auspicious
occasions.
O, how I resented having to play indestructible croquet
Using tack-hammers for mallets, they were lost!

So, I behaved badly. We have parted company
Over something silly; and should believe you, I guess as I
love you
When you tell me that you will be back again next year
And next year—even if you "have to play the game with
yourself"
(As you say)—that the badminton will be better than ever.

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Two Poems by Erica Jong

Jubilate Canis

(With apologies to Christopher Smart)

For I will consider my dog Poochkin
(& his long-lost brothers, Chekarf & Dogstoyevsky).
For he is the reincarnation of a great canine poet.
For he barks in meter, & when I leave him alone
his yelps at the door are epic.
For he is white, furry, & resembles a bathmat.
For he sleeps at my feet as I write
& therefore is my greatest critic.
For he follows me into the bathroom
& faithfully pees on paper.
For he is almost housebroken.
For he eats the dogfood I give him
but also loves Jarlsburg swiss cheese.
For he disdains nothing that smells—
whether feet or roses.
For to him, all smells are created equal by God—
both turds and perfumes.
For he loves toilet bowls no less than soup bowls.
For by watching, I have understood democracy.
For by watching him, I have understood democracy.
For he turns his belly toward God
& raises his paws & penis in supplication.
For he hangs his pink tongue out of his mouth
like a festival banner for God.
For though he is male, he has pink nipples on his belly
like the female.
For though he is canine, he is more humane
than most humans.
For when he dreams he mutters in his sleep
like any poet.

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For when he wakes he yawns & stretches
& stands on his hind legs to greet me.
For, after he shits, he romps and frolics
with supreme abandon.
For after he eats, he is more contented
than any human.
For in every room he will find the coolest corner,
& having found it, he has the sense to stay there.

Depression in Early Spring

Meathooks, notebooks,
the whole city sky paley flaming
& spectral bombs
hitting that patch of river
I see from my eastern window.

The poets are dead, the city dying.
Anne, Sylvia, Keats
with his passionate lungs,
Berryman jumping from the bridge & waving,
all the dreamers dead
of their own dreams.

Why have I stayed on as Horatio?
Anne sends poems from the grave,
Sylvia, letters.
John Keats' ghostly cough
comes through the wallboard.
What am I doing here?
Why contend?

I am a corpse who moves a pen that writes.
I am a vessel for a voice that echoes.
I write a novel & annihilate whole forests.
I rearrange the cosmos by an inch.

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Robert Walser

Snowdrops

I've just been writing a letter in which I announced that I had finished a novel with or without pain and distress, that the considerable manuscript was lying in my drawer ready to go, with the title already in position and packing-paper at hand, for the work to be wrapped and sent in. Furthermore, I have purchased a new hat which for the present I shall wear only on Sundays, or when a visitor comes to me.

Recently a parson visited me. I found it nice and most proper that he did not look at all like a professional one. The parson told me of a lyrically gifted teacher. I intend to go before long on foot through the spring country to this person who instructs the village school children and writes verse as well. I find it beautiful and natural that a teacher should concern himself with higher things and have experiences of the more profound sort. Yet on account of his profession he has to deal with something serious: with souls! Here I think of the wonderful "Life of the Merry Schoolmaster, Mari Wuz, of Auenthal, a Kind of Idyll," by Jean Paul, a book, or booklet, that I have read with delight I know not how often and will probably read again and again. The main point is that now the spring is just beginning again. So here and there I'll succeed in writing a pleasant-sounding line of springtime verse. It is wonderful that now one need not think at all of heating. Thick winter-coats will soon have outplayed their role. Everybody will be glad if he can stand around and go about uncoated. Thank God there are still things about which everyone is united and agrees nicely with one another.

I have seen snowdrops; in gardens and on the cart of a peasant woman who was driving to market. I wanted to buy a bouquet from her, but thought it not right for a robust man

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like me to ask for so tender a thing. They are sweet, these first shy announcers of something beloved by all the world. Everyone loves the thought that it will become spring.

It is all a folk-play, and the entry costs not a penny. Nature, the sky above us, is conducting no mean politics, when it presents beauty to all, without discrimination, and nothing old and defective, but fresh and most tasty. Little snowdrops, of what do you speak? They speak still of winter, but also already of spring; they speak of the past, but also saucily and merrily of the new. They speak of the cold but also of something warmer; they speak of snow and at the same time of green, of burgeoning growth. They speak of this and that; they say: Still in the shadows and on the hills lies a fair quantity of snow, but where the sun reaches, it has already melted away. Yet all sorts of hoar-frost may still come this way. April is not to be trusted. But what we wish will nevertheless win out. The warmth will assert itself everywhere.

Snowdrops whisper all kinds of things. They bring back to mind Snow White who in the mountains found a friendly welcome from the dwarfs. They remind one of roses because they are different. Everything always reminds one of its opposite.

Just wait. The good will come. Goodness is always closer to us than we think. Patience brings roses. This old, good saying occurred to me when recently I saw snowdrops.

—Translated by Tom Whalen and Trudi Anderegg

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believed was to ~~make~~ have black ~~recognizably~~ recognized as black - and White ~~recognizably~~ recognized as white. Not to mix any up about the two And not, particularly, to do so by means of any non-dialectical ~~process~~ process. ~~up to the yesterday morning~~ Such summation of her nature and powers by her ~~own~~ very flesh and blood made her doubt her own identity. Had she been deceived all her life about her own identity. And any argument to set them right could only, if ~~it were~~ successful, bolster the original contention: She could make black white. She had broken down into a fit of crying she couldnt control.

Rita hated such emotional outbursts. She believed, and Wilma thought she was right, that over grooming and Exposed feelings were alike Selfish They made onlookers uncomfortable. Her sobbing had become more violent. Never the less Wilma's ~~Rita had increased~~.

Rita had handed her a glass of water. Drink this. There's enough real trouble here with out your carrying on about a mis understanding over flowers. I dont know what you said over the phone to Ted But what Ted thought you said sounded perfectly natural to me and Orville. After all you are the oldest. You did come farther and oftener than the rest of us to be with mother. Why shouldnt you want to show your special closeness to her by ~~wanting to~~ Send my flowers Separately under your own name. There's nothing wrong in that.

To Wilma's mind there was something wrong in that And wrong or not wrong, ~~to~~ of Rita believed that She was Such a person, they were strangers, ~~after fifteen~~, not Sisters. When She had not taken the glass of water, Rita had set it on the Sink and left the Kitchen.

A Jessamyn West manuscript page

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Jessamyn West
The Art of Fiction LXVII

Mary Jessamyn West was born July 18, 1902 near North Vernon, Indiana, to Eldo Ray and Grace Anna Milhous West. When she was six years old, her family moved to Los Angeles County, settled for a time on an orange ranch and two years later moved to nearby Yorba Linda. After her graduation from Fullerton High School, she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from Whittier College. In 1923, she married Harry Maxwell McPherson, and moved with him to Hemet, California, where she worked for one year as a school secretary. "The principal was glad, after that one year, to give me a job as a teacher," she says. For the next four years she taught in a one-room school.

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In 1929, after Miss West had resigned her teaching position, she studied at Oxford University during the summer session, visited Paris, and then returned to her studies at the University of California at Berkeley; she was in the midst of preparing to take her orals for her doctorate degree when she had the tuberculosis hemorrhage that was the beginning of years in bed. In August, 1939, she entered LaVina Sanatorium. At one point, the doctors said she wouldn't recover, that she should be taken home to die. Miss West has written of this time in the first section of The Woman Said Yes. *She did recover, though it was not until 1934 that she was able to join her husband in Mt. Shasta where he was principal of the high school. In 1940, the McPhersons moved to Napa where her husband became the superintendent of schools.*

Miss West began her writing career by publishing in small literary magazines, a practice she notes, "spared her some disappointment." Her stories have since been widely published in more popular magazines, and included in many of the Best Short Story *collections. Her first collection was published in 1945:* The Friendly Persuasion. *Miss West's other publications include: novels,* The Witch Diggers *(1951),* Cress Delahanty *(1953),* Little Men *(1954),* South of Angels *(1960),* A Matter of Time *(1966),* Leafy Rivers *(1967),* Except For Me and Thee *(1967), and* The Massacre at Fall Creek *(1975). Volumes of short stories include:* Love, Death and the Ladies Drill Team *(1955), and* Crimson Ramblers of the World, Farewell *(1970),* The Woman Said Yes *(1976). Nonfiction works include:* The Reading Public *(1952), and* Love Is Not What You Think *(1960). She was written a book of poetry,* The Secret Look *(1974), and an opera libretto based on the life of Audubon,* A Mirror for the Sky *(1948).*

Miss West met me at the gate of the Napa Valley house where she lives with her husband, retired school superintendent Harry McPherson. She took me to the small room where she writes. It contains a wooden desk, a chaise-lounge where she sat while we talked, a chair, and at one end, a bed built

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into a windowed alcove that looks out into the front yard. She writes sitting up in this bed, a habit carried over from the years she spent recovering from tuberculosis.

During the course of the interview, McCall's *telephoned to ask her to do an article on Ruth Stapleton, President Jimmy Carter's faith-healing sister. She was invited to sit on a panel with Alex Haley. Interruptions continued. She herself would stop to point out a hummingbird by the front window, the quail in the driveway, or the white rooster. A gray cat with crossed eyes lives in a cupboard in the house, two Pekinese wander about, and Speck, the hunting dog, watches from the outside.*

"On February ninth, I am going back to Indiana to receive the Indiana Nobel Prize." She laughed. "They're very smart about whom they give it to . . . Kurt Vonnegut got it two years ago." She seemed pleased and amused. But at the first question, Miss West pounded her knee in what seemed complete disgust.

INTERVIEWER

When did you first feel you were a writer?

WEST

I'm not pounding my knee because of that question. I am pounding my knee because of the discrepancy between the desire when I was very young and of which I have proof, and that I was so late in getting at it. I have just come upon a large scrapbook given to me by my father and mother when I was fourteen years old. I think they expected me to paste pictures in it, or keep programs. I have it here. In it, you can see, I have written thirty plots. Across about half of them, I have written, "NUTS." That is actually very compassionate editing. Here is plot nine . . . labeled "decent."

> A hobo walking along a road in Autumn. The air is crisp. Hobos don't usually look happy. This one does. He is walking alone dreaming. He is going back to his only daughter. He has

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> been away for a long time. He wonders if she is grown up now. It is almost evening when he reaches the town. A town of little homes. Their lights come on. He goes to the city directory and he casually asks about a girl named, blank, blank, blank. *(I hadn't thought of a name yet.)* He asks if they will tell him where she can be found. The hobo is in a hurry to find her now. It is now beginning to get even a little chill. The lights of the girl's house are all lit up. The hobo decides he had better look in the window. He does. He sees people and he realizes that his daughter is about to be married. This is a home of wealthy people. Then he looks at himself. He realizes that he is ill-kempt, dirty, ill to look upon. The hobo stays to see his daughter come down the stairs. He thinks she would be ashamed to have a hobo enter and claim to be her father. So he thought, he has anticipated seeing her for years, for her own good, before someone might recognize him, with a muttered prayer for her, he stumbled out into the gathering mist.

It sounds a little like Enoch Arden. He was a man who came back. But there I was at fourteen doing that. Wanting to write. But I never told a soul. I wasn't the kind of child who spent time telling stories. As an adult, I tell anecdotes, but I am wholly a writer with a pen in my hand. And I am even a reader with a pen in my hand. I almost feel as if I am not complete as a human being unless I have that pen in my hand. I really don't feel happy reading unless I have the pen so that I can write out great hunks of quotations from books I like. I cannot resist doing it. It is as if the writing comes down and what I read flows back up the veins and becomes part of me. Lots of people don't like it, but I even like the *feel* of writing. I like marking the signs that stand for words on a page. I like the look of it. I'm not a person who wants to crochet or peel a carrot. There's other work I do, but I prefer it to be big muscle work. I want to sweep and scrub. But writing . . . just the muscular physical activity of writing, I love.

And how did it begin? First, I was mad about reading. Sometimes I think a writer should make up his mind whether he's going to be a writer or a reader. There isn't time for both. I've never quite made up my mind. Gertrude Sweitzer,

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a very good writer, made the statement that she only permitted herself to read thirty minutes a day. But as for me, I go to sleep reading and I wake up reading. Somehow I have the feeling that in some book is the great treasure I've been looking for all my life.

INTERVIEWER

Did you tell anyone you wanted to be a writer?

WEST

For me the beginning of wanting to write was never telling anyone, never taking any writing classes. I'd never seen a living writer. I'd never *met* anyone who had seen a living writer. I thought that it was so God-given, so enormously strange and peculiar a thing that was visited upon a writer, that I surely couldn't be one of those persons. I didn't know that a writer was just a human being who writes. Cellini said that in foggy weather he could see a halo around his head. I had the idea that the writer must be given some sign by which he would know that he was a writer.

But I did begin with the plot book. Real plots for short stories. Ways to avoid saying, "He said, she said." "He stammered, he enumerated." All that now has gone out of style since Hemingway. I also kept historical tidbits that I thought I could somehow insert into a story. "Bola Pasha" (whoever he was) "before he was to be executed got himself a new pair of white gloves to wear for the execution." I thought I would surely be able to use that.

INTERVIEWER

Did your family know about your plot book at the time you were working on it?

WEST

I don't know. My mother did know some things I wrote. I know because I hurt her feelings terribly. Hurt my father's feelings too. In a notebook somewhere I wrote, "My mother is a slattern."

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INTERVIEWER

Oh dear.

WEST

Well, she was. I have exactly the same tendency. When she went out, she was snappy. Too snappy. Split skirts with taffeta pleated in the split, that kind of thing. I wanted her to look more like a grandmother. Gray hair, big fat bosom.

So she read someplace, "My mother is a slattern."

My father sat me down and cried. He said, here I was, the eldest daughter and I was supposed to be a stay and a comfort to my mother and why did I write things like that?

Well, I went into the bathroom. While I was there, I thought up something to say to him that was just about as bad. It was stupid of me. I came out and said, "Papa, I would like you to know that whereas in the past I've been a very rough, uncouth kind of an animal, a dog, I'm now going to be a sweet, gentle, domesticated dog," and on and on. I was a would-be writer working on something. I don't know what my father thought.

INTERVIEWER

Didn't your father write some poetry?

WEST

Not poetry. Rhymes. He would send them back East from California when we moved there. Things like, "Oh, you poor benighted Hoosiers." Some were published in the newspaper. He had not at all the gusto my mother had.

INTERVIEWER

Did your parents ever encourage you to write?

WEST

No. It isn't the same as the young person who wants to play the piano, dance, or who is an obvious mimic. That child is seen to have particular talent, and he is encouraged, given

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lessons. But the poor kid who likes to read and write needs a vein of iron in him to keep at it. My parents were not aware; they took my doing well in school for granted. They did not come to my college graduation. They had planned a trip to the desert or someplace. Maybe this is kind of Quakery. They looked on my education as just a formality. They knew I'd finish the four years. It didn't bother me in the least.

INTERVIEWER

In *The Woman Said Yes,* you recount a conversation with your mother shortly before she died.

WEST

Yes. My mother had had a series of strokes so she sometimes was completely with us and sometimes not. Once she said to me, "I am so happy to see you, Mama." I said, "Hey, you got it all mixed up. You're the mama and I'm the daughter." She said, "Well, just so one of us is . . . it doesn't matter, does it really, which is which?" And I said, "No, it doesn't." She lived in a hell that I have not penetrated. I didn't go into it in *The Woman Said Yes*, because I thought there was enough hell in the book. But not to know who you are or who the people about you are . . .

She had always loved the idea of my writing the Quaker stories because they were about her people. She had described the landscape for me, and the nature of the people, while I was recovering from tuberculosis. So she said to me, "Did I get all of those stories written?" I said, "Yes, Mama, you did. You got every one of them written and published."

INTERVIEWER

In *Hide and Seek*, a conversation takes place between you and a man called "Son." He says to you, "You're a writer. Writers have the idea that they're the only ones whose words they need to pay heed to. Let anyone else start a story and their minds wander." Are writers like that?

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WEST

Well, I don't think their minds wander anymore than anyone else's. "Son" was assuming that the writer, if he heard something, would begin shaping it and forming it for his own story. But it is very unusual to hear anything of enough interest that you want to embroider, to shape into a piece of fiction. You remind me of something Graham Greene said in his autobiography. He was talking about overhearing in a hospital a ten-year old boy who was not expected to live: Graham Greene listened to him with a kind of interest that afterwards he thought of as being almost nasty. But he said, "A writer has to have a splinter of ice in his heart . . . " Something that keeps him on the outside, makes him objective. There wasn't a thing he could do about the boy so he listened and learned. He was operating as a writer, not as a fellow human. I think I would be a better writer if I had more of an icicle.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think there was any advantage in starting to write as late as you did?

WEST

No. The thing for a writer to do is to start writing as soon as he can. There are things you can only say when you are young, though you may regret them when you're older. The young heart can expose the young heart as an older person cannot. Byron said when he went back and read what he had written years before, "God, what a genius I had then."

INTERVIEWER

How do you think being a Quaker affected your writing?

WEST

I think I was affected by the Quaker attitude, don't stick your neck out, don't take a chance. My grandfather, I can remember, thought ill of people who boasted about what they

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were going to do. A man said, "When my apple crop comes in, I will have money, and I'm going to Philadelphia." Then something came up, and the apples didn't mature. My grandfather said, "Don't go around boasting about what you are going to do. If you get to Philadelphia, people will know." Furthermore, a Quaker principle was that if you did have any aptitude for words, then your writing should be something that preaches a lesson. Stories should have a moral. The plots I wrote when I was fourteen had pretty good morals. In a story about a girl who disobeyed her mother, the mother said, "Don't go to a dance . . . don't wear a low-necked dress." The girl did. She went to the dance . . . she wore a low-necked dress. She caught a cold, the cold went to pneumonia, and she died. I have had people feel that it was frivolous to write any other kind of stories.

INTERVIEWER

How have your Quaker relatives responded to your published works?

WEST

A cousin of mine wrote to my professor of English at Whittier College and to my poor mother (who had been so proud that her daughter had a book published) to say, first of all, no Milhous had ever said "ain't." Second, it was degrading to the Quaker faith to have Jess pray louder than was necessary. Actually, he was not really shouting to God, you know, he was trying to make himself heard above the organ. Third, I often used dirty words. I said that a duck (and it was a Quaker duck too) deposited duck dung on the steps, and that Jess didn't like ducks for that reason. My cousin felt I could have found some other way to say it, in spite of the alliteration. She was not, however, typical. But, certainly I came out of that culture, or non-culture, whatever you want to call it.

INTERVIEWER

Did you expect to make money writing?

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WEST

No, I got married young. We were poor. I got a job as the society editor of the Yorba Linda Star. Then I was a school secretary for a year. The superintendent was very happy to give me a job as a teacher. I wasn't unhappy. I've got too much teaching blood in me. I enjoyed teaching. It was a one-room school and I got to pitch for both sides. But I never thought of making money from writing. It never occurred to me. I didn't have to think about it the way a man does because I had a husband. So when I did begin to write, I sent my stories to little literary magazines: *New Mexico Quarterly, Prairie Schooner,* and to a lot that have disappeared. I thought I couldn't write the kind of stories that were in the *Saturday Evening Post.* So by sending stories to the literary magazines, I saved myself from getting an enormous number of refusals. The professors who edited the literary magazines wrote me letters. I never saved a letter from a boyfriend under my pillow, but the first letter from an editor I kept there so I could wake up in the night to read it over again.

INTERVIEWER

Did you write at all while you were in the sanatorium with tuberculosis?

WEST

No. I was sick, too sick to even read. I was sent home from the sanatorium to die. They told my mother, "She's going to die, and we need the beds. Take her home, and let her die amongst her loved ones."

INTERVIEWER

Did you think you were going to die?

WEST

At first, I thought I was going to get well right away. I'd never been sick before. But it got worse and worse, so there seemed no point in living that kind of life. With TB you

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aren't supposed to laugh too much. You're supposed to be just as half-dead as you can. Your lungs have lesions and the breathing breaks those lesions open. If I could have thought of any decent way to kill myself, I would have. I would have been glad not to wake up.

INTERVIEWER

Because of the number of writers who were at one time consumptive, many people assume that during the time of the illness, they had plenty of time to think and imagine stories to write.

WEST

I didn't do any imagining of stories. You have raging fever, pleurisy, night sweats, like someone with a strong attack of flu. You're just miserable. You reach the point where you can't stand up. It was only when I began to be well that I began to write.

INTERVIEWER

When did you first sell a story?

WEST

I cannot remember. The first time I got any money was from a little literary magazine called *Foothills* which took a couple of stories of mine and though they didn't pay anything at the time, at the end of the year they gave me $5.00 for a story they thought was the best they had published that year. With the money, I went out and bought a book right here on this shelf—a collection of Tudor poetry by John Verdan who was a professor at the University when I was studying there.

INTERVIEWER

Would a writer's life be easier being married to another writer?

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WEST

I don't know that those marriages work out well . . . whether it's two literary people or two movie actors, maybe even two school superintendents. My husband, Max, is not a literary person. If he were a terribly literary person who wanted to look at everything I wrote, I might not be able to stomach it. I cannot stomach it even when my editor shows tendencies in that direction. There are examples. Virginia Woolf had a literary husband and they worked together in the Hogarth Press. But then you have someone like Scott Fitzgerald and Zelda where there was such competition. So it's worked out for me. Max reads an occasional novel, but mostly ones that I say, "Hey, you're going to miss something if you don't read this." He reads books about schoolwork, about farming, investments. I think maybe if he had a different wife, he might never have bought anything but a practical book.

INTERVIEWER

Can he give you technical help?

WEST

He helped with *Massacre at Fall Creek.* There I was dealing with geography that wasn't very straight in my mind, and with the law, which he knew more about than I did.

INTERVIEWER

Has he ever criticized your writing?

WEST

Yes, some of the stories in *The Friendly Persuasion.* He didn't want me to send them out. He thought they were too trivial.

INTERVIEWER

Did that bother you?

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WEST

No. He's not the greatest reader and judge of that sort of thing. His failure to respond doesn't mean that there won't be some people who will. He was excited about *Massacre at Fall Creek,* but it didn't have many more readers than *The Friendly Persuasion.*

INTERVIEWER

Have you written about characters you could not sympathize with?

WEST

In a story called "Public Address System" there was a man I could not feel for. I started out hating him and I ended up feeling sorry for him. He was pitiful. He was deranged, actually, and of course, I don't know how you can hate deranged people.

INTERVIEWER

When you begin novels or short stories, what do you start with?

WEST

I think of a character in a situation. The character must be involved. I mean, he can't just stand there. . . . So, the two, character and situation, go together. I sometimes think that I would have written plays . . . if I had been a person who had gone to any plays. It is that part of writing—conversation—that is easiest and most exhilarating for me.

INTERVIEWER

What do you like the least?

WEST

The scenery. The horses driving up to the door. That sort of thing. But when the characters start talking, then I feel perfectly at ease with them.

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INTERVIEWER

What form do you like the best? Novels, short stories?

WEST

At first, I thought I couldn't write anything but short stories. The idea of writing a novel was utterly unnerving . . . I mean, to have to go on and on forever. When I began to write a novel, I intended to write it like a series of short stories. I had the feeling that each chapter could be resolved in the way a short story is. Then I saw that I was wrong. At first, I didn't think I could write the novel. But now, I have reached the point where I would rather. It's an easier form, because the short story requires a far tighter construction. With the novel you simply live with the people for a considerable length of time and you write as things happen, whereas the short story, like the poem, must be convoluted for a purpose . . . a shaft of light into that particular happening.

INTERVIEWER

What advantages are there (or handicaps) in being a woman writer?

WEST

There are enormous handicaps for either the man or woman who chooses writing. The woman has the handicap of not living a life as expansive as a man's. He has experienced more. Not better. She has not seen war; she cannot write about it to the same degree. She hasn't been able to go into a bar and just talk, not sex talk, not trying to pick up a man, but just *talk* of what's going on that day. Politics, the this and the that. She has a more restricted life. As for the man . . . alas the poor man! How could I have written if I had been a man? I would have had to try to work. I would have had to find some work that I could do that would not wreck my lungs. So, the woman's experience is limited but on the other hand . . . often a woman has a meal ticket so that she has an opportunity to devote herself to the writing and not worry

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about the money. If I had to write as most men have to write, in order to earn a living . . . I don't know . . . maybe I'd have been a better writer.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think you always had the basic faith that you would be a successful writer?

WEST

The only way to protect yourself from bruises is to be pretty convinced that what you are writing is a dud, and then have a happy surprise. I know a man who has sent his novel to my agent convinced he had written a masterpiece. My agent is going to have to tell him that it is absolutely unpublishable. My way of going at it is easier on the writer . . . finish it, not really think it's very great . . . and then have the great surprise. That's the way I operate.

INTERVIEWER

What about geographical location? Can that benefit a writer? You were in Paris in the twenties.

WEST

I was there! I was in Paris the summer of my twenty-sixth year. I had gone to Oxford to study. I met a young woman who told me I would get educated a lot faster if I went to Paris. The summer at Oxford was rather dull. So I did go to Paris. The first thing I wanted to find was a bookstore. But the lady I boarded with (she was an Oxford graduate and had been decorated during the war . . . Joyce's daughter had stayed with her, I remember) was an avid botanist and I went with her by train out of Paris and walked for miles while she gathered botanical samples. She kept warning me not to drink the water. She wanted me to drink wine, but since I didn't like the taste, all summer I drank something terrible manufactured by the British called lemon squash. Finally she told me about Shakespeare and Company and it was at that

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bookstore I bought a first edition of *Ulysses* . . . which I still have. It was against the law to bring it into the United States so I hid it in my trunk. It happened that I was enormously taken with marmalade in stone jars, so in the top layer of my trunk were stone jars of marmalade, and in the bottom was Joyce's *Ulysses.* When the customs examined my stuff, they took one look at a tourist so stupid to come home loaded with marmalade, and they didn't go any lower than that.

INTERVIEWER

Talking about geographical locations, is it more difficult to be a writer living on the West Coast as opposed to a seaboard dominated by an Eastern establishment?

WEST

Well, I don't know. I would have gone through exactly the same things as far as getting published. I know that Wallace Stegner feels that West Coast writers are put down, and that we are not thought of, or credited with as much as should be due. Perhaps he has more basis for this feeling than I have. Did I tell you the story about the man interviewing me on the radio in New York? He said, "I have been trying to figure out what your accent is." I asked, "Well, what's your decision? He said, "Rural." I didn't know what to make of that. His sounded Brooklyn to me. Does my accent sound "rural" to you?

INTERVIEWER

Not to my rural ear.

WEST

I hate to hear myself. I never listen to an interview. I don't sound like the person I think I am.

INTERVIEWER

What do you consider your greatest gift as a writer?

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WEST

I'll tell you what I think my greatest weakness is. I don't think I'm a very good plotter: I mean, of the mechanics of the story. I was in Hollywood for nine months during the making of *The Friendly Persuasion*. I remember Mr. William Wyler, who directed it, saying to me, "Jessamyn (actually, I think he said 'Miss West'), we've got to get one more 'will he? won't he?' into this." I tend not to do enough of that and I think this is what a reader wants.

INTERVIEWER

We keep hearing that fiction is in a great deal of difficulty.

WEST

It is. So many novelists no longer seem to care what happens to other human beings. Many contemporary fiction writers are in somewhat the same position as the metaphysical poets were. The novel has become a sort of metaphysical composition. After the Elizabethan lyrics came the metaphysical poets. Perhaps life itself doesn't run a sharp fictional line.

INTERVIEWER

Is what you've just suggested implied in what you are working on now?

WEST

I hope not. True, I am in the midst of another novel. The title is *The Life I Really Lived,* and then it has to say beneath it, "A Novel." I will read to you two things which have to do with its background: First of all, Jorge Luis Borges, the South American writer: "A man sets himself the task of portraying the world. Through the years, he peoples the space with images of provinces, kingdoms, mountains, buoys, ships, islands, fishes, rooms, instruments, stars, horses, peoples. Shortly before his death, he discovers that the patient labyrinth of life traces the image of his face." And from Oscar Wilde: "One's real life is the life one does not lead." So,

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that is *The Life I Really Lived*, A Novel, by Jessamyn West. It begins in Indiana, ends in California, and, though it is not my real life, it is my real life in Wilde's sense. And, of course, feeling as I do . . . it may never be published.

INTERVIEWER

But you always *are* published, aren't you. You're a public figure. You're on talk shows . . .

WEST

Once I was on the "Today" show with Barbara Walters. She said, "You know who you remind me of?" I, of course, said, "No," because I *didn't*. She said, "You remind me of Julie Nixon." Of course, Julie Nixon's about fifty years younger than I am. Apparently, at that time, a good deal was being made of the fact that Barbara Walters knew the Nixons . . . and indeed she was grasping at every chance. It's odd what happens when you wander afield. Did I tell you about my session at Berkeley on the creative personality?

INTERVIEWER

What did they tell you?

WEST

Well, they didn't. I finally never knew whether I had any creative personality. Truman Capote was there, and, among other things, we were to see if we could be hypnotized. I don't know if that meant we were creative or uncreative. We were put up in a hotel, fed, and tested. We had all we wanted to drink. Just before our group they'd had a clutch of scientists, but they didn't give the scientists anything to drink because it was thought they might give away valuable information. On hand was a man who was to hypnotize us. He did not look as if he could hypnotize anyone. I did not want to add to his list of failures, so I thought: "I will be hypnotized if it kills me." But I could not be. He would say, "Try to lift your arm now. You can't." I was determined. Tears rolled

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down my cheeks. I don't cry easily: I was trying to have a dead arm, but it just didn't work. Truman had been in the session before me. When I came out in a dilapidated state, I told him about my grim determination to get hypnotized. He laughed and laughed. He said, "That wasn't necessary. I didn't want to hurt him either. So everything he told me to do, I did. I shammed. It was no strain on me." So, ever since then, when I think of Truman Capote, I admire his prowess. He's a very smart fellow. It was so simple: it wasn't necessary for me to have gone through that awful struggle.

INTERVIEWER

I wonder if we could end by asking: What defines genius for you, in the writer?

WEST

Well, I'm afraid it is some gift, talent, or ability that cannot be accounted for in a technical way. I wish I could say something about writing which is clear-cut and might reveal the connection between writing and life. I know that if I had to make the choice between not writing again or not reading again, I would choose to keep writing. Much as I can be moved by what I read, it is not the experience of having people about whom I put words on paper actually live and breathe. Perhaps that's part of the mystery and magic of writing . . . that you can't encompass it in any kind of definition or aphorism . . . or do anything but shake your head and strike your breast. It's beyond me, but thank God, I'm mixed up with it.

—CAROLYN DOTY

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Searching for Boga

Gerald Dorset

"Child of joy, where the sun doesn't shine, where the walls are white and bare like a bathroom, where you waste years of your life . . ."

August Strindberg, *Easter*

1

Ever since his return from hell he dreamed of paradise. The idea struck him suddenly one afternoon at the office. But he put it off in haste trying to concentrate on the work at hand. The thought popped up again and again until it began to irritate him and he had to chase it away with a cup of coffee, cigarettes and conversation.

The same evening he couldn't concentrate on watching television. He tried to read a book, he perused the newspaper. The image was taking clearer shape and its ludicrous impracticality annoyed him. He put on his jacket and went out.

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Broadway was ablaze with lights. He needed people, noise and motion to disperse nagging thoughts. The neighborhood movie theatre provided easy solution. (Are there easy solutions of life's complicated problems? Has escape ever solved a puzzle?)

There was that man, whose sole purpose in life was to find the meaning of human existence. After arduous travels through many lands he came across a venerable old sage seated in a desolate valley who had contemplated the same question for decades. The man bowed respectfully to the ground and asked the holy hermit what he thought life's meaning really was. The sage gazed a long time straight in front of him and didn't say a word. The exhausted traveller, having spent so much time and effort, and sensing that he was near the source, became stubborn. He started to beg, cajole and supplicate the old recluse. Finally, the bearded guru said: "Life is a fountain."

This reply not only didn't satisfy the stranger at all, it sounded to him silly, superficial and inadequate. So much so, that he fell in tantrums, began to shout and curse the old man, covering him with abuse and saliva. The *guru* looked puzzled at him then with a voice quavering with uncertainty asked the traveller: "You mean to say, life is not a fountain?"

A fire brigade is rushing to a scene of arson. Sirens screaming, red-light *tourettes* blinking. Patrol cars follow in the fast procession. Must be a big one.

Novak entered the marble palace. They were showing a double feature. He caught the "B" picture first—a detective story with comic overtones. It was light and entertaining. Then came the main film. A popular Hollywood tough guy was serving in a strange, exotic land. He was bringing the message of democracy and civilization when he fell under the spell of a native charmer. All odds were against him, but he bravely fought on for his love and the people who had entrusted him with that responsible mission.

The love story intrigued Novak, but he couldn't concentrate on the plot. The jungle background and the natives'

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huts forced associations differing from the playwright's intent. He left before the end.

It was well past eleven and people were still wide awake and milling around. A hot, muggy summer night in New York. The West Side is a city by itself. It has the most attractive facades in town. The houses here have character and tradition. But it is slowly going to seed. The fashionable set has slowly moved to the East Side. The stately look grimy and gloomy, with garbage cans piling high on the sidewalks. Another strike in the gasping city.

Near Riverside Drive serenading groups meander. A cheerful bunch of tanned Puerto-Rican youngsters are strumming on guitars along 78th Street.

"Si tu non me besas, me besa la otra . . . . "

Laughter and gleaming eyes. A moonlit night among the skyscrapers. The asphalt breathes heavily. Asthmatics cough at the windows. Barges laden with coal and timber hoot their way down the Hudson River. The New Jersey shore sparkles in new condominiums. The Washington Bridge looms in the night, spanning the two banks. It is an overwhelming picture of relentless activity and organized human achievement. Without purpose. Novak felt more depressed.

Dow-Jones shows new high. There is talk about rates, interest, tenders and pure oil dissidents. Dun & Bradstreet lowers its credit rating, which will cost the city two million a year.

Beneath the Riverside Park cars, thousands of them, humming in a low key their menacing tune along the tense, nervous throughway. Manhattan sings its weird lullaby. No one it seems wants to go to bed. Least of all Novak. The jigsaw is fitting into place, the image emerges. It takes the whole night to clarify details and take the final decision. The late late show is on.

Novak used to visit Laura often in her hotel on West End Avenue. She is OK, Laura. She just hates being married. It cramps her style. After the divorce she reverted to her maiden name—Rubin. Laura Rubin is the darnedest attractive brunette

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woman he ever saw. Attractive but slovenly. Smart but sarcastic. Good heart but full of spite. They fight a lot. Secretly he admires the girl. She is nuts and yet lots of fun. But she's got brains. She is bad for his morale.

Laura has written 29 one-act plays. They all stink. But imagine only: 29 different plots. 29 elaborate situations and 87 *dramatis personae*. My God, when does she have time to sleep? Laura is hostess in a fashionable restaurant. She has a fine appearance and is a sharp dresser. The reason Laura took a job as a hostess is that she has more time to concoct her drama plots.

Once, in the beginning of their relationship, he invited Laura Rubin to a candlelit dinner at his apartment.

Novak bought that cookbook, *Casanova's Own Kitchen,* specially for the occasion. Everything was organized well ahead of time. He makes a list and buys all ingredients. The big day comes. The wine is right, the flowers exude tender fragrance, the stereo emits dreamy music for lovers. She comes practically dressed only in perfume. She has on a mesh evening gown with deep decolleté and open back. And long black kid gloves. They sip on the martinis, nibble on the caviar canapes and begin to dine. Laura purrs like a kitten and drowns him in compliments. His cooking is out of this world, his taste in wine superb, his feeling for flowers, his taste for . . .

All right. So after the coffee and the liqueur he asks her to dance. They dance for an hour. Just swaying at the same spot. He is dizzy from her perfume and the closeness of her body. She is twenty-five. Cautiously and skillfully he pushes her towards the *boudoir.* They repair upon the bed and he begins to undress her with loving care.

Laura doesn't even offer a token resistance. She even helps him in the proceedings. He is elated and all worked up. He can't believe his luck.

Then, the wench let him have it.

She hits him in the nose with a right uppercut, pokes him full strength with her elbow in the stomach, breaks a vase on his head and jumps out of bed.

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"What do you mean, you lousy clod, by saying you loved me! You don't even know what the meaning of the word is! I told you, you may kiss me but you aren't to try to make love to me. Can't you get into your thick skull that I like you and respect you as an intellect, but I *hate* you as a man. I hate *men*, don't you see . . . "

"But, but, wait a minute, Laura. . . . You are a normal . . . You've been married before, you know the score . . . "

Swishhh—bammmm! Another porcelain vase meets his head and flies to pieces. "I told you not to try to seduce me. You aren't a gentleman! You are a phony! You are a fraud. What do you mean with your suavity and charm? You can't pull a fast one over me. I've been raised and brought up in a sound mid-western community. I'm a Chicago girl, see. We have a strict set of rules there, buster. We value and respect womanhood. You lousy son-of-a-bitch of a masher, pulling a prick out on me, are you? I ought to kill you for taking advantage of my innocence and naivity . . . "

"Look-a-here," he protests desperately. "I pay my taxes. Moreover I'd go to the wars tomorrow, if they call me under the flag . . . "

Finally he succeeds in putting Laura in a taxi and sending her home. O, yes, they continue seeing each other. They'd go now and then to a concert together, to the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, to some little night club in Greenwich Village, to the movies. But never did he repeat his seduction scene. She often teases him about it. "How would you like to try for double or nothing?" she would say. "I bet you are scared to death I'd bite your head off. No, honest I'm not that awful. Matter of fact I enjoyed that night in your place tremendously. You were terrific. You know, you'd make a perfect husband to some lucky gal. You can take a lot of abuse and *keep* your dignity."

Great tease Laura. Sometimes she is too much, though. Whatever else, she's got personality.

Novak often asks himself why should he leave New York, he's got it made here. He must. To preserve his sanity, and

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integrity. New York neither poses questions, nor gives answers. It is a void. He looks up. Bright stars, millions of them. His eyes register the light of how many dead stars, gone, finished long ago. It is weird living in a noisy cemetery.

Soap box orators on the corners, the flag and a sign behind.

Repent, you sinners! You are going to hell and you know it. If you enlist with Jesus Christ you are saved in the nick of time. Don't you shilly-shally, you bums, now is the time to make that most important decision. Christ hates sin, but he loves sinners. He loves you, and you, and that lady over there. It's all right, lady, I'm not being personal. Just illustrating a point. Novak must find his guru some day.

In St. Patrick's a wax pope sits under a glass bell. A hungry Spanish janitor, out of work for a month, throws a brick and breaks the glass.

"Why did you do it, man?" asks the judge. "This was blasphemous, don't you know?"

"I am sorry, your honor. I must have been crazy. Will you forgive me?"

"Let God forgive you, man."

Grand Central is for sale, can't pay its way through. The flesh mill grinds without a pause. No time for remorses and regrets. Gotta catch the train. Round trip by subway every day. You scurry through long sullen corridors oblivious to the fetishist and the fire bug.

An old man faints. A college student relents. Two fat women murmur. A pregnant girl faints. An old man gives her his seat. Somewhere in the viscera of Times Square smelly tunnels. The belly of Grand Central rumbles. Still lower into the rocky earth other bowels run under East River into Queens and Brooklyn.

Jagged flanks jostling naive tourists and eccentric old-timers. Who dares patronize soda-vending machines? Amorphous mass of misogynists, masochists, machinists, matrons, mulattoes, mothers-to-be, morons, mites, mentally retarded, motormen, moonshiners, monsters, monks, mother superiors, mamies, mutts, mice, ten thousand of them, half-awake, lured

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and trapped down below for half a morning or well into the night. Choking smoke. Something's wrong with the motor of the train in front of us. There'll be a slight delay. Don't panic everybody, keep calm. A jolt catches everyone off balance. The cops are watching for pickpockets and molesters.

II.

Salutations to the world and sing of love, always, forever, ceaselessly, untiring. She smiles so nicely. She is like Shirley Temple at five, pure and sweet in the first blush of extreme youth, a little girl of fifteen, her hair combed now in a pony tail, now cascading down her shoulders. With red lips. Her laughter can be heard when she is out of his sight, for when she is sitting in front of him she only smiles and looks at her feet. He sings loud, in the shower, and trembles from the cold water and her image. When shall we hold hands again? She plays the piano and touches a wrong note now and then, he turns the pages of her music and sighs with love. She thinks he is humming her melody under his breath. She strikes a languid pose on the couch under the blue-grey painting of Braque, a pinch of ashes in the crystal ash tray. She knows not what is love, she only suspects, and dreams. But who is lovlier than she? And an undefined melancholy descends upon him. Her door opens and the maid brings in the tea. They drink slowly and talk about the weather and fine books and wait for her maid to come in again. She brings out a letter from a satin box, waves it over the lemon rinds and tears it to pieces. He stares at her stunned. Tears drench her white blouse. Discarded, passed by, laid in a box alone, then destroyed. He is distraught and unhappy. She comes in his arms and covers him with kisses. Is it not love?

Yesterday they loved and life was sweet. She doesn't play today. She looks through the window and talks to the birds. So young and so cruel. But she doesn't know it. She wants to be happy and deserve praise. She is with him alone in the room and thinks of her next love. Or is he mistaken in his

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reproach? She might think of her future wedding dress. Her bridal gown and her bridal bouquet. She looks at him and sits at the piano. Is she destined to tell him all her thoughts, all her lovely thoughts? She runs the keys up and down and sighs. Then she says, "Each day brings you further from me. Why?" He is caught unaware and cannot give her a reply. Long sob and long cry. Could it be that she entertains the same thoughts about him, the ones that just ran through his head? How painful to love and to suffer in vain. He stands up and gazes out of the window. She tiptoes to him. Her arm rests on his shoulder like a swan, her head slightly inclined. "I wish I had wings," she says. A butterfly flies in and disappears in the dark corners. The maid comes in to take the tray and the butterfly flies away with her. She picks up her needlework and begins to work with a quiet air.

A middle-aged woman, hair done up in a bun, vacuuming the living room.

There is rhubarb in the entresol.

—He isn't home I tell you.

—I must see him, must speak to him.

—Don't you hear what I say?

—Very important. Must not fail.

The clatter subsides then resumes its ferocity. There is another way out no doubt.

Haliotis, a large snail with a large bowl-like shell bearing a row of respiratory holes. It was the abalone we ate at the New Year's party. Its mother-of-pearl shell for ornamental objects. The men on the staircase argue some more. His calabash brother sings accompanying himself on ukulele Arthur Godfrey style. Abaddon is to be differentiated from Abadan where the oil flows freely, for it is the depth of hell, Apollyon like. Could the abominable snowman be direct descendant of Cain, east of Eden?

Now then, New York is a fine city, it has parks, it has theaters, it has big houses, it has its Times Square, it has the Hudson River, it has opera houses, it has movies, it has bars, it has mighty churches and cathedrals, there is nothing that New York hasn't got. Yet.

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Gregory Kundert

Bananas

The bananas in the basket
on top of the refrigerator
give me pleasure
out of all proportion
to what I paid for them.
A little while ago, for the fifth
time today, I remembered
their existence, their perfection.
For the fifth time
I thought "I'll have a banana!"
it seeming at the moment
the perfect thing to do.
But again the very thought
seemed to complete them, and me,
in a satisfaction which instantly
occluded itself, and I had
no banana. Or, I had
perfect bananas, but ate none.
But this cannot go on indefinitely: I am
getting hungry, and hungry, especially
for a banana. I know they are still
on top of the refrigerator. I have them
clearly in mind. I swear this time I will
eat one, perhaps as many as two. And then
I will probably revert to my former pattern.
This is really
getting the most from one's bananas,
and is possibly the ideal behavior toward bananas
in the higher synthesis of pleasures.

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Peter Payack

The Barrel & Beyond

The philosophical pickle ponders both that which is, and that which might be "beyond the barrel," as speculative thought is usually described. He wonders what makes a cucumber "pickled" and speculates whether "life as we know it" exists in the Beyond. After many months of study he determines that reality is made-up of four primary elements: cucumbers, brine, pickling spices, and "The Barrel." Further he concludes that there exists a Prime Mover who not only "sets the whole works in motion," but also decides what is to be, gives orders to the Barrel & Beyond, and generally operates outside the limits of normal pickle thought and morality. That night at dinnertime, the Prime Mover eats the philosophical pickle with a hamburger.

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Three Poems by Brian Taylor

Ducky

The sisters are waiting
in the trophy room: Belinda
and Ducky. The morning
is the color of café-au-lait.

Belinda, in salmon-pink silk
with the brown printed roses, sips
the air as if
about to speak. She has nothing

to say. Crosses her sleek legs.
Lights a cigarette.
The stag's head droops, the
stuffed pike gapes, while

Belinda closes her eyes
against the blue Turkish smoke.
Darling, she says, be
a darling, put something

suitable on the gramophone.
But her sister strides to the
window, her heels
heavy on the warped linoleum.

She fingers the buttons
of her bodice and gazes
at the sun-stained blind.
Behind her back, the space

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is crowded with yellow horns
and leathery gills. She opens
the window, and the room inhales
the dust. She hoists

her skirt, straddles the sill,
steps onto the fiery gravel,
and the house collapses like a paper bag,
for nothing stays when Ducky goes.

Play-Time

Lavinia leans on her dwarf,
her towel slapping
his dark hump, leans but is
jaunty enough—haunch
and ankle and damp-curly nape—
and she so pale and tall
on those chunky sandals.
Sophonisba drowses
against the tile steps, the steamy
water lifting her tits.
Thisbe, horizontal, slides
through the oily ripples, her
tight head, her rosy
buttocks rising, falling,
pearly under the smoky
glimmer of the lamps that swing
from the dripping vault.

When the roof gave, they
raked up the mosaic
and sold it by the kilo sack.

My mouth acid with coffee,
I watch you pattern the tabletop
with two-thousand-year-old

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tesserae. The traffic
chatters like a brief cadenza
of trumpets and kettledrums.
The *camerieri*, too, look at you
with lecherous eyes.

The cliffs of cloud build
over Kansas. Westward,
where we came from, the light
still flecks the ocean
of counties; the silos flatten
and darken and shrink,
as the Rockies raise their
damaged heads and surge east
five-hundred miles. What do you
know of time? With the first
fireflies, the sky
opens its livid folds.
Listen, you say, It's
going to rain. I saw lightning.

Yes. And I saw Beethoven,
hunched in his velvet loge,
looking at the silent applause.

Just Good Friends in Pecos

Henut and Judy sucking lollipops
are the room's only furnishing.
The dusty sunlight
prints the flaking wallpaper
and their slim dark dresses
with slats of gray and amber.

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Close-cropped curls, feathery
mascara, high rounded breasts—
they are so still and silent.
But the coppery sostenuto
of the desert sunset shrills
against the window. The hot wind
jostles tumbleweed
between the shells
of automobiles and the husks
of gas-pumps. In another time.

It must be through me,
she said. You will filter
like rainwater between my body's
awful stones. Blue and translucent
she sat in the tangled sheets
hugging her knees, seeming to bruise
whatever it was flickered
like a moth in her teenage heart.
There was blossom beyond the curtain,
but the bed smelled of fear.
You are not alone, I said.
There are others just like you.

I slide the pistol back
into its polished holster and finger
the leather with respect—
like a Sunday shoe. My own voice
surprises me: Okay, girls,
let me see you dance. And I want
to see you kiss each other
with your sticky mouths.

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Mark Rudman

Abilene

There are no cattle in Abilene.
I expected cattle.
I thought they trafficked in cattle in Abilene.
And diners. I expected diners.
Abilene isn't even western anymore.
There are more foreign cars than cows.
The women are right out of Vogue.
I expected swimming holes and I got heated pools.
You could prowl the streets naked and never
Get arrested.
You could order coq au vin at any coffee shop
And get it, but fried chicken,
Never.
There is a local television station that runs
Old movies about Abilene all night.
No one falls asleep till dawn.
No one dreams.
I am out of it in my levis and Frye boots.
The streets are so smooth you could walk a lifetime away
And never wear the soles down.
One day they just stop moving. You gut them for your collage
And trade the label in for a pair
Made to disappear.
Everything in Abilene is replaceable.
There isn't much to talk about though
Except what's happening elsewhere.
That is why I have come to Abilene.
The job is secondary.
I would have come back to Abilene anyway,
No matter what,
Eventually.

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I was born there.
I spent my boyhood there.
I remember cattle. They once kicked up so much dust
Coming into town around nightfall
I could not see them but knew they were there,
In Abilene, then.
I earned my dimes shining shoes and I had a great view.
The women headed towards the wells with buckets.
Even the dust got watered, and the black flowers on their
dresses.
Steam misted the windows of the Abilene Hotel.
Now the smoke of factories hides the factories.
Nothing is invisible anymore. The cattlemen never
Ran out of stories, or at least never told them
The same way twice.
I know. I was the kid. I listened. I was there.
Now everyone in town is all grown up.
Abilene, Abilene, Abilene, Abilene.
It could be an international city.
They should put up a monument and take down the town.

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Two Poems by Roland Pease

Held Up for Answers

Three powerful people
seized me, held me at gunpoint,
and demanded answers. They didn't want money.
One of the women ordered me to answer for myself
immediately. I spoke rapidly; I gave her
my name, address, occupation, and favorite color.
She wore a blue bandana. Then I listed
ten reasons why I believe capital punishment
is a crime, and why Patty Hearst is a victim.
I sensed confusion, her left foot tapped anxiously.
I was about to speak again when she ordered me silent.
The weapon left my side, she disappeared.

The second woman told me I wouldn't be shot
if I could tell her where the tribes of the sixties
had settled. Her gun was focused on the accuracy
of my answer. I paused a moment, then said, yes,
I knew—the tribes were last seen in Mendicino,
on the cliffs, carrying driftwood from the sea.
She stared into a silence that would have killed
if it had fired, she shook her head and walked away.

I wasn't afraid of the man at first, he reminded
me of my sister. But when he hissed his order,
I knew I was in for it. He insisted I hire minorities,
or I'd resemble the teacup he then crushed beneath
his boot. He faded away, leaving me speechless,
wondering what my employees would do. I work alone.

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Three revolvers left my side in the afternoon
last week, and I'm puzzled. How should I prepare
for their possible return: pack a sidearm, move
to Monterey, hire someone, or pretend that the entire
affair was a furious illusion, and hope that I'm right.

The Only Sound

I go for silence
to the rear of my closet.
I'm safe from sound there.
No sirens, alarms,
horns or voices
approach me there.
But to be certain
I put cotton in my ears.

With my cat, I sit and rock
in the shade near my shoes.
Sometimes I remove the cotton,
and allow a meow.

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Susan Fox

Sceaux the Day They Turn Off the Fountain

Calmly clouded Tuesday.
The chateau is closed.
Nothing glitters.
We walk up the steps
The water usually falls down.
We circle the circular pool.
We picnic illegally with our forbidden charcuterie
Behind a hedge, and hide the package there
From tonight's rain and tomorrow's glitter.
I do not feel like Empress Someone slumming.
I do not feel like a maid on holiday.
I do not feel like Alice or like Chloe.
Content, we amble,
Pausing above a huge tiered lawn gone almost to meadow,
Beside a shallow canal which any other day
Might have looked cosmic,
Its two straight lines leading half a mile to nowhere,
Contained by two straight lines of poplars
Also leading nowhere—
Or everywhere, perhaps, when the sun is out.
We sit between the poplars and a bank
Watching the gray-brown surface reflect nothing,
Receive no shadows,
Allow the few brown carp pacing its length
To be seen whenever we can see them.
Halfway between Arcturus and a ditch,
Nothing vast and nothing vile,
Just a kilometer of quiet water by which to sit.

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David Ignatow

A Prayer in Part

Now that we have ordered well may we turn back
upon suffering; after the fixed moments and precision,
to seek comfort in release. Peace being with us,
may we flourish in our design and discover, peaceful,
that we are not human until we die—now that we have
ordered
all the rules may we seek out what rules us;
when we have fixed all matter in a pattern,
as who have emptied all problems into one
and made science simple may we break down;
now that there is nothing not said or recorded
and made use of may we give back the whole thing—
since we are through thinking and all that is needed
is to do may we sit back—now that what remains
is but to live well, all means being available
may we drop them and go, go somewhere that is not
calling us,
that is not in us, for which we have no earthly use at all.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Gerald Dorset has recently published a novel, *Adventure in the Rich Port* (New Earth Books) and two volumes of poetry, *How to Write Love Letters* and *Time Music.* He lives in New York.

Arno Karlen has had work appear in the *New American Review, New World Writing #17, Antioch Review* and *Transatlantic Review.* A collection of fiction, *White Apples,* was published by Lippincott in 1961.

POETRY

Sam Abrams lives in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. He is currently working in documentary television.

Sandra Alcosser directs the Poets-in-the-Park program in New York City. She is a former guest editor at *Mademoiselle.*

Trudi Anderegg lives in St. Gallen, Switzerland, where she teaches kindergarten.

Joe David Bellamy is the editor of *Fiction International.* He teaches writing and literature at St. Lawrence University.

Michael Benedikt is the poetry editor of *The Paris Review.* His most recent book is *Night Cries* (Wesleyan University Press).

Billy Collins is an assistant professor at Lehman College of the City University of New York. He has a collection of poetry forthcoming from Kenmore Press entitled *Poker Face.*

Ann Darr is the author of *St. Ann's Gut* and *The Myth of a Woman's Fist.* Her works have appeared in numerous anthologies.

Dean Faulwell has had poems in *The American Poetry Review, Chelsea, Oink!* and elsewhere. This is his second appearance in *The Paris Review.*

Susan Fox teaches at Queens College in New York City. Her book, *Poetic Forms in Blake's Milton,* was published by the Princeton University Press in 1976.

Karen Hubert has had work appear in *Sun, Poetry Now* and elsewhere. Her book, *Teaching and Writing Popular Fiction,* was published by the Virgil Press.

David Ignatow was the recipient of the Bollingen Prize in 1977. His books include *Facing the Tree* (Atlantic Monthly Press) and *Selected Poems* (Wesleyan University Press).

David L. James has had poems appear in *Poetry Now, New Letters, Skywriting* and elsewhere. He is currently enrolled in the master's degree program at Central Michigan University.

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Erica Jong is the author of several volumes of poems and the recently published novel, *How to Save Your Own Life*. She lives in Connecticut.

Gregory Kundert has had work appear in *Madrona, Steelhead* and other small magazines. He lives in San Francisco.

Elizabeth Neiditz has published in *The San Francisco Review of Books* and *Newsart*.

Peter Payack is poetry consultant to the Cambridge (Mass.) Arts Council. This is his fourth appearance in this magazine.

Roland Pease has had poems in *Poetry Now, The Hollow Spring Review* and *Dark Horse*.

David Ray has two books forthcoming: *Enough of Flying* (The Writer's Workshop of Calcutta), and a fiction collection to be published by the Cold Mountain Press.

Judith C. Root has worked as an editor and freelance writer. She currently teaches at Drake University.

Mark Rudman's poems have recently appeared in the *American Poetry Review, The Virginia Quarterly* and *Roof*. Last year he won a P.E.N. Translation Award.

Brian Taylor is a native of England, and presently lives in St. Louis. "Play-Time" and "Just Good Friends" are part of an as yet unpublished collection entitled *Ways of Henut Wedjbu*.

Robert Walser was born in Biel, Switzerland in 1878. His work includes prose poems, stories and a novel entitled *Jakob von Gunter*. Mr. Walser died on Christmas Day, 1956.

Tom Wayman published in *The Paris Review #67*. His third collection of poems, *Money and Rain: Tom Wayman Lives!,* was published by MacMillan Press of Canada.

Tom Whalen has published fiction, criticism and translations in *Michigan Quarterly, Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction* and *Pequod*. He teaches writing at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts.

Ina Chadwick Wilde is an editor of *Gravida*. Her work will soon appear in *The Antioch Review, Shenandoah, Oink!* and *Connections*.

INTERVIEW

Carolyn Doty received an honorable mention in the Joseph Henry Jackson Award competition for a novel in 1975. In the Fall, she will be attending a Writers' Program at U.C. at Irvine, with a teaching assistantship. She is currently at work on another novel.

Charles Ruas lives in New York. He is currently at work on a documentary about the arts in New York City for public television.

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CHRONICLE

Norman Glass has published criticism in *Books and Bookmen, The Times Literary Supplement* (London) and numerous translations from the French. He recently translated (with Clayton Eshleman) *To Have Done With the Judgment of God* by Antonin Artaud (Black Sparrow Press).

ART

Randy Stevens is represented by the Kornblee Gallery in New York City. Her work is represented in the Hirshorn Collection and a number of private collections. She lives in Boston where she works as a cocktail waitress.

Marcia Resnick has published two books of her photographs: *See and Tahitian East.* Two more are forthcoming: *Landscape/Loftscape* and *Re-Visions* (Coach House Press).

ERRATUM

The editors regret the omission of the name of Galway Kinnell, the translator of Two *Ballades* by Francois Villon that appeared in #70.

THE PARIS REVIEW is pleased to announce the Aga Khan Fiction Prize for 1977 has been awarded to C.W. Gusewelle for his story *Horst Wessel* which appeared in #70.

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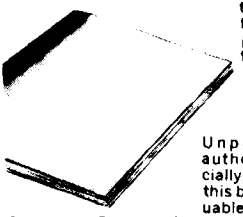

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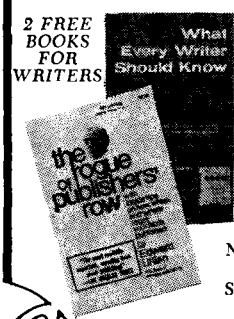

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